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SKULL ISLAND

ALSO:

LOGAN

STAR TREK

H. G. WELLS

DOCTOR WHO

CARRIE FISHER

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AND MORE!

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ISSUE
433

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horror

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FEBRUARY

SCIENCE FANTASY

THE SIGNAL
EXISTENZ
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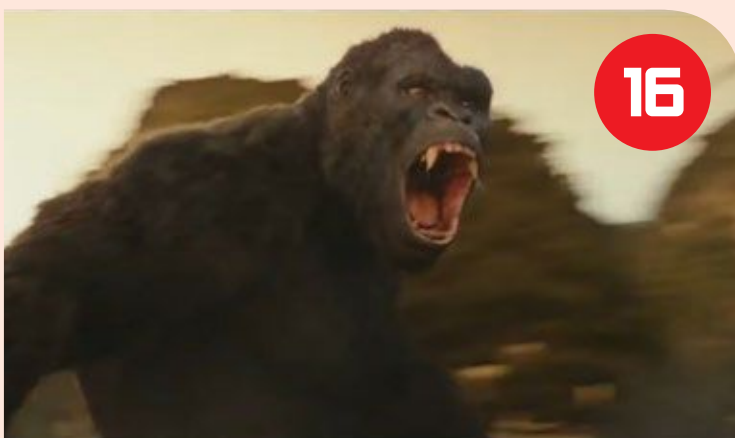
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EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 433!

It was a sad end to 2016. The passing of Carrie Fisher affected not only avid **STAR WARS** fans; she was a pop culture icon. To many, she was a part of their childhood. The added tragedy of her mother, Debbie

Reynolds, also passing so quickly and suddenly is almost too sad to comprehend. How dreadful for Billie Lourd to lose her Mother and Grandmother in rapid succession. Yet again, we start an issue of this magazine with an obituary that I hoped we would never have to print.

It is almost impossible to measure the amount Carrie Fisher achieved for the feminist cause with her portrayal of Princess Leia Organa. In this post-Whedon era, it is difficult to imagine how ballsy her character was back in 1977. Leia was no damsel in distress. She gave as good as she got. Her character was a breath of fresh air, and was the beginning of an overdue change in the handling of gender identities in cinema. Despite the backlash, Steve Martin was correct. Carrie Fisher was beautiful (inside and out), yet that was her least important facet. Her writing skills were razor sharp, her open-minded approach to life infectious, and her zany personality always seemed to win everyone over. We should all be grateful for that *lightning in a bottle* moment when Carrie was cast in this iconic role. A role that helped pave the way for Buffy and her faculty of modern leading ladies.

STARBURST interviewed Carrie many times over the years, and she will be greatly missed. It is of some consolation that we will all get to see her final screen performance later this year, and get to see OUR Princess once again.

Also in this issue, we prepare for the return of a movie icon with **Kong: Skull Island**. By the time I got to see the original **King Kong**, it was already an old movie, yet it grabbed me immediately. I also have a soft spot for the 1977 remake, starring a slightly rosey robotic version (and a bloke in a monkey suit). To celebrate, **STARBURST** previews the latest version, whilst taking you on a journey through the many varied encounters with the greatest of great apes. We even take you on a tour of *stop-motion animation* (that thing we did before CGI).

Kong may be on his way back but it's time to say goodbye to another franchise, as we preview **Resident Evil: The Final Chapter**. Video games on the big screen may be hit and miss, but Resi definitely won itself some fans with a saga spanning six movies. Along with the preview, we also bring you up to speed with the story so far in the games.

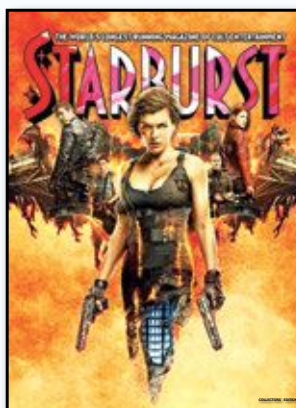
Wolverine is also having his swansong, and we bring you the lowdown on **Logan**. It certainly is a busy issue, but we still have made room for all of your regular favourites.



Until next time,
keep watching the weird and wonderful,

Jordan Royce

Jordan Royce



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FEEDBACK

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STAR

YOU JUST MADE THE LIST

I read the Movies of the Year piece in Issue 432 and would like to say thank you as it's brought some hidden gems to my attention! Without your list, I wouldn't have checked out such films as NINA FOREVER, SWISS ARMY MAN, and THE GREASY STRANGLER. I was aware of them, but certainly didn't expect them to be worth my while so when they appeared in the chart, I knew I had to try them. What fantastic films! No wonder your writers' voted for them above some of the more mainstream (and disappointing) releases.

Toby, via EMAIL

That is just what we like to hear! Most people know about the blockbusters but it is sometimes other films that can slip under the radar and people can miss out on, which is such a shame! Especially if they have not been released on the big screen and go straight to DVD, but even then there is so much being released, especially with all of the choices on VOD!

LETTER

ROGUE ONE: A STAR WARS SNORING

I saw ROGUE ONE twice, but I doubt I'll be able to tolerate the movie for 12 viewings, like THE FORCE AWAKENS. Here are a few thoughts on the movie:

- Forest Whitaker is hilariously bad as Saw Gerrera ("Lies! Deception!"). They should have put helium in his oxygen mask, something David Lynch originally envisioned for Frank Booth (played by Dennis Hopper) in BLUE VELVET. Imagine Whitaker delivering his lines with a Donald Duck voice! That would have made for some truly dramatic moments, hehe.

- Despite being dead for over 20 years, the very late Peter Cushing is back as Grand Moff Tarkin (recreated with impressive photorealistic

CGI). That reminds me of the Marilyn Monroe sketch by Monty Python:

Interviewer: "Carl, we're all a little mystified by your claim that your new film stars Marilyn Monroe."

Carl French: "It does, yes."

Interviewer: "Who died over ten years ago?"

Carl French: "That's correct."

Interviewer: "Are you lying?"

Dead actors starring in new movies: once an absurdist sketch, now the very reality!

- They should have named the movie 'Star Wars: Rogue One' or 'Rogue One: A Star Wars Adventure' (a more spicy title), recast some roles (especially Felicity Jones and Diego Luna; both actors lack charisma, something Daisy Ridley and John Boyega have in spades), add more lightsabers, include more screen time for Darth Vader, more to do for K-2SO and Chirrut Imwe; these two should star in their own movie, they're the best new characters in ROGUE ONE. Ben Mendelsohn is also great as villain Krennic (he was also truly creepy in LOST RIVER). Mads Mikkelsen, despite being a great actor in other roles, is once again on autopilot. I would love to see dialogue between K-2SO and C-3PO!

- Things get more interesting during the third act, aside from a few good moments in the first and second act. Too bad the whole movie isn't like this. It's more like 'Star Wars: The Audience Awakens During the Third Act'. I'm curious about STARBURST's opinion on the movie!

All the best,
Y-7A8 (the CGI recreation of Darth Kapreles), BELGIUM

STARBURST Readers may remember *Darth Kapreles* regularly writing in and sending us a photocopy of his cinema tickets from his 12 trips to see STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS. I suppose there is no chance of us expecting a similar work of art after seeing this film! It sounds like once is enough for you! Oh well, there will be plenty more STAR WARS

movies in the c-inema.

Check page 72 to find out what STARBURST thought of the movie, and turn to page 130 for the Editor's personal views on it!

FANTASTIC FLAWS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM..

Imagine a film, which is set in the 1920's, full of that decades historical fashions, culture and architecture; with it's rich speak and lingo... then don't bother using it. Unless it's to show its constant destruction of course.

Imagine a film, where wizards and witches use magic as though breathing, a flick of their wand to get dressed, to cook, to set the table. A flick of the wand cures all Unless it's needed to get a cockroach in a teapot of course, a trick called 'humorous padding' is available then.

Imagine a film where the hero's every word is important, so he mumbles every syllable.

But above all... Imagine a film that holds a terrible curse, a dark curse, a destructive curse..

The curse of the 12A... Which has the ability to make a film that will be spellbinding for children, a film that will be as dark as pitch for adults and renders it useless for both.

And that's not the only thing that's got this reader's goat...

As a follower of DOCTOR WHO, (a fraught follower in recent years) I thought it was just the prerogative of our program that took a strong male lead character, who looked at life

differently with his quirks and puzzle solving... then introduced a negative female 'companion' to try and dismantle these very traits at every turn. But thank heavens it's not, as Christmas viewing highlighted.

For Sherlock (and Watson) has his Mary and Jonathan Creek, his wife.

I'm sure someone far more cynical than I would suggest the very reason these female characters are created is to take away from the fact that the writer can't think of a good puzzle for our hero to solve in the time given so muddies the water with needless constant back-biting one liners.

Are all these writers male? Could they not ask the BBC to make their programs just as long as the puzzle would take to unravel (A ten minute Sherlock would be delightful). Do all main female characters have to be stropky, bullying, and negative to show how 'strong' they are...

BUT WAIT...

No, for I remember my enjoyment at watching Watson in ELEMENTARY or Charlotte Appleby in THE LIVING AND THE DEAD and ALL the female characters in HUMANS... Thank heavens for that, not all strong female characters have to be written clumsily.

Nygel G Harrot, via EMAIL

Oh well, only another 11 months (or 10 depending when you are reading) until the next DOCTOR WHO Christmas special is on for everyone to moan about. That's if they get another...

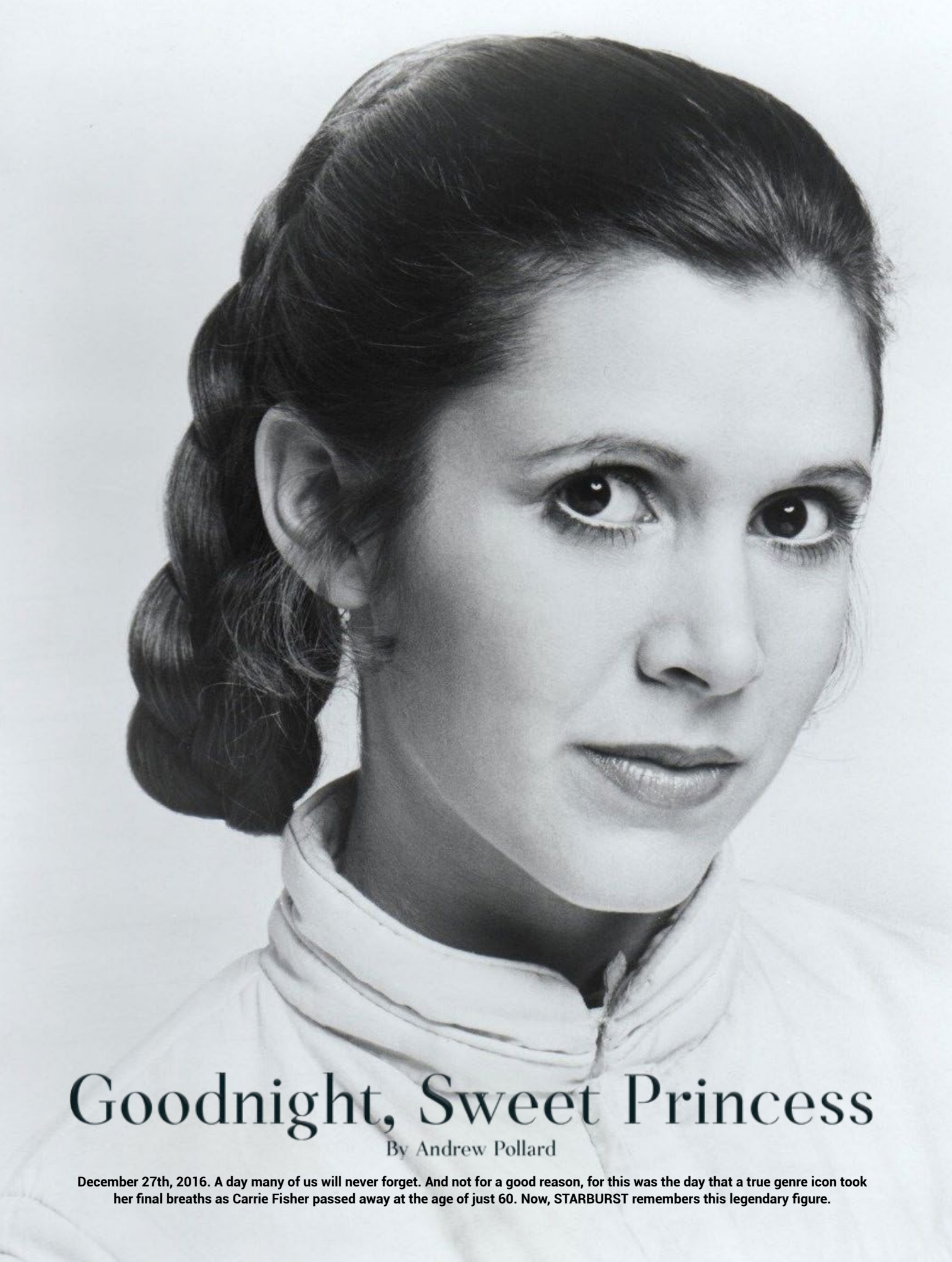


"King Kong's new ventriloquism act failed to impress his test audience."

Winner: Tim Dennant. Head over to www.starburstmagazine.com to enter this month's caption contest.

STARBURST

NEXT ISSUE: 434 ON SALE FROM FEBRUARY 17TH



Goodnight, Sweet Princess

By Andrew Pollard

December 27th, 2016. A day many of us will never forget. And not for a good reason, for this was the day that a true genre icon took her final breaths as Carrie Fisher passed away at the age of just 60. Now, STARBURST remembers this legendary figure.



By now, we're sure you'll have all heard of the passing of Carrie Fisher. Still, that doesn't make it any easier to swallow, and, if we're honest, here at Moonbase Alpha we're still reeling from the tragic news. Flying from London to Los Angeles on December 23rd, Fisher suffered a heart attack just 15 minutes before the scheduled landing. A fellow passenger performed CPR on the actor and writer before she was taken to Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center. It was there, after four days in intensive care, that the world – hell, the galaxy – lost one of its biggest shining stars. 2016 was an utterly horrible year for celebrity deaths, and this was one of several last gut punches from a year that many were eager to leave well behind.

Carrie Fisher's story was given one more heartbreaking twist even after her passing. Just one day following the death of her beloved daughter, Carrie's mother, Singin' in the Rain star Debbie Reynolds, also passed away. According to Carrie's brother Todd, Reynolds had a stroke just 15 minutes after she'd talked about how all she wanted was to be with her beautiful daughter. The 84-year-old wouldn't recover, and would soon be reunited with her treasured Carrie.

Born Carrie Frances Fisher in Burbank, California on October 21st, 1956, being the daughter of singer Eddie Fisher and actor Debbie Reynolds immediately thrust Carrie into the glitz and glamour

of Hollywood. The marriage of her parents would end when Carrie was just two years old, and her younger years would be famously spent deep in books, particularly classic literature and poetry. After appearances on Broadway, young Carrie Fisher would get her big screen break in 1975's Shampoo. A boisterous sex comedy draped in satire and social commentary, the film starred Hollywood A-listers such as Warren Beatty, Julie Christie, and Goldie Hawn. Her role in Shampoo may have been only a small one, but Carrie's next movie was the one that skyrocketed her to superstardom. Yes, we're talking about Star Wars.

Just 20 years of age when George Lucas' famed galaxy far, far away was introduced to audiences on May 25th, 1977, Carrie Fisher had us all wrapped around her finger by the time we'd heard "Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You're my only hope." As the stunning, bold, bullish, take-no-nonsense Princess Leia, Fisher was instantly set into the hearts of many and was soon transformed into one of Hollywood's biggest names. Just to put this into perspective, she was actually still studying at college while shooting Star Wars, and it would be her commitments to Lucas' saga that saw her ultimately make the call to leave college behind. But just like that, an icon was born, and still to this day many will go weak at the knees at the mere mention of Princess Leia, and this feisty character

could and can melt even the coldest of cold hearts, with Fisher's Leia managing to be one of the first characters to really balance the gig of sex symbol and feminist hero. At a time of damsels in distress and women who were portrayed as always needing a man for even the simplest of tasks, Princess Leia was a shit-kicker of epic proportions, standing up as an equal amongst her peers – actually, let's face it, she eclipsed pretty much most of said peers – and more than happy to get her hands dirty regardless of what the job at hand was. She may have been 'Princess' in name, but this was no Disney sort who needed saving from the evils of the world. No, this was a gamechanger for how Hollywood and audiences perceived a female lead, with Leia making general audiences realise that, yes, you can be one of the most beautiful creatures known to man yet that doesn't mean you can't kick some ass when needed.

Of course, Carrie Fisher would return as Princess Leia in 1980's The Empire Strikes Back and 1983's Return of the Jedi (not to mention the direct-to-TV Star Wars Holiday Special in 1978), but she'd also appear in plenty of other features and shows over the following decades, such as starring opposite Ringo Starr in 1978's Ringo, playing the miffed former beau of John Belushi's Jake in 1980's The Blues Brothers, performing on Broadway in 1982 in Agnes of God,





joining Mia Farrow and Barbara Hershey in Woody Allen's 1986 *Hannah and Her Sisters* and appearances in the likes of *When Harry Met Sally...*, *The 'Burbs*, *Drop Dead Fred*, *Austin Powers*, *Scream 3*, *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*, *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*, *Wonderland*, *Smallville*, *Sorority Row*, *Fanboys*, *The Big Bang Theory*, and *Family Guy*. Added to this, she also did screenplay work and script polishing gigs on the likes of *Lethal Weapon 3*, *The Wedding Singer*, *Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot*, *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*, and the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy.

Whilst Fisher's star did indeed continue to shine once her trips to a galaxy far, far away came to a halt, her career maybe never quite hit the heights that it should've. It's not unfair to say that this beloved icon had, like so many others in the Hollywood game, some certain demons of her own, with Fisher openly talking about her battles with drugs, drink, and mental illness. It was largely through these battles, though, that she drew the inspiration for some of her excellent and acclaimed written work, such as *Postcards from the Edge* and *Wishful Drinking*. And glimpsing slightly further into her personal life, Carrie was an item with Paul Simon from 1977 to 1983, was briefly engaged to Dan Aykroyd in 1980, returned and married Simon in 1983, divorced in 1984, had a relationship and

child (*Scream Queens* actor Billie Lourd) with Bryan Lourd, and only last year revealed that she had a three-month fling with Harrison Ford while filming *Star Wars* back in 1976.

Still, despite her mountainous highs and plummeting lows, Carrie Fisher once again brought that sparkle back to the big screen as she returned to her most famous role of Leia Organa for 2015's *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. To see her back in that world, particularly alongside Han Solo and Chewie, or during that hug with Rey (who we're still yet to find out whether is or isn't related to Leia), brought a tear to the eye of many longtime fans of the most beloved genre characters we've ever seen. If *Star Wars* is the greatest genre franchise of all time – and let's face it, it is – then Fisher's Leia is the perfectly formed cherry on the top of that proverbial cake. She may have had her issues with returning to play Leia – famously taking many a dig at the weight loss she felt was pressured onto her for the return ("I'm in a business where the only thing that that matters is weight and appearance. That is so messed up. They might as well say get younger, because that's how easy it is.") – but it certainly didn't show in her performance, and she seemed to be having just as much fun as we all were. And despite a relatively small role in J.J. Abrams' *The Force Awakens*, Leia is reportedly set for a far more expanded

role in this year's *Star Wars: Episode VIII*. On that front, the aftermath of Carrie's death saw it revealed that she'd actually already finished shooting her scenes for Rian Johnson's *Episode VIII*. Similarly, she was believed to feature heavily in Colin Trevorrow's *Episode IX*, although that's something that Disney and Lucasfilm will have to address down the line. For now, though, we'll get to see Carrie Fisher in her most famous of roles one last, bittersweet time come *Episode VIII*'s December 15th release.

She may not have always been perfect, she may not have always played by the rules put in front of her, but that was exactly why we all loved Carrie Fisher so much. Most of us never got to meet this hero of ours, yet she is so engrained in our memories of us and will forever hold a special place in our hearts; she managed to be very much just a regular person in so many ways, yet there was always the foreboding shadow of Hollywood and its vices lurking in the background. And so with that, we sadly have to say goodbye to our prized Princess. Sleep well, Carrie, may the Force be with you, always, and we sincerely thank you for playing such a huge part in so much of what we here at STARBURST hold dear.





Carrie Frances Fisher 1956 - 2016

THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE
BEST (AND WORST)
OF THIS MONTH'S
MOVIE / TV NEWS



DC

In the aftermath of the Harley Quinn mania that surrounded David Ayer's **Suicide Squad** last year – seriously, any convention that we've been to over this past year has been overflowing with all kinds of weird and wonderful takes on the Joker's main squeeze – it was revealed that Margot Robbie's Harley Quinn would be heading up a future movie. Well, that movie now has a title *and* a director. With **Suicide Squad**'s David Ayer at the helm, Warner Brothers has announced that the female-driven effort will be titled **Gotham City Sirens**. At this stage, there's no confirmation on which characters will be joining Robbie's Harley Quinn, although the comic book title of the same name has featured the likes of Catwoman, Poison Ivy, Zatanna, and Talia al Ghul. Geneva Robertson-Dworet, who has recently worked on screenplays for the upcoming **Sherlock Holmes 3** and the **Tomb Raider** reboot, is putting the script together for **Gotham City Sirens**, which has yet to be given an official release date, although rumours suggest that Warners are fast-tracking the film for a 2018 release.

From Gotham to Atlantis, and James Wan's **Aquaman** has found its villain. Playing Orm, aka Ocean Master, will be Patrick Wilson. Wilson is no stranger to comic book movies, having played Nite Owl in Zack Snyder's **Watchmen**. Additionally, he's also worked with director Wan on the **Insidious** and **The Conjuring** franchises. In the comic book realm, Orm is the half-brother of Aquaman, to be played here by Jason Momoa. One of his main characteristics is simply that he's severely jealous of the Marine Marvel's grip on the throne of Atlantis. As such, he employs tactics laced in terrorism and piracy, not to mention his magic trident, to try and usurp his half-brother as King. As well as Momoa, Wilson joins a cast that includes Amber Heard as Mera, the Queen of Atlantis, and Willem Dafoe as Vulko, an Atlantean advisor. Aquaman will next be seen as part of Zack Snyder's **Justice League** when that hits cinemas this November, and then he'll swim to screens with his own feature on October 5th, 2018.

One hero who will be joining Jason Momoa's Aquaman in **Justice League** is Ben Affleck's Batman, but all doesn't seem exactly smooth sailing where the Caped Crusader's upcoming solo movie is concerned. With Affleck on board to direct and pen the film's script (alongside DC's iconic Geoff Johns), and with Joe Manganiello already cast as the villainous Deathstroke, the hugely talented Affleck has sent out some worrying signals by stating that the film is "not a set thing" and that "if it doesn't come together in a way I think is really great, I'm not going to do it." Affleck is a longstanding comic book and Batman fan, so it's great to hear that he's not just going to throw something together to make a quick buck, but his words may well have a few Warner Bros higher-ups a tad worried. Tentatively titled **The Batman**, previous stories had the film pencilled in for a spring 2017 start. With Affleck's passion for the character and his excellent track record when it comes to directing – **Gone Baby Gone**, **The Town**, and **Argo** – all seems in place for a movie that could be something

truly special. Still, we'll have to see how this all develops and if Affleck get his wish of something really great.

Chalk this one down to merely speculation right now, but still, it's certainly an interesting proposition. Dwayne Johnson shared an attention-grabbing photo with his social media followers over the festive period, picturing himself enjoying a relaxing tittle with Henry Cavill. Johnson got tongues wagging by captioning the image: "Today we drink like gentlemen and come together as friends. We're excited for what the future brings #DCWorldsWillCollide". **Fast and Furious** star Johnson has long been signed on to play the villainous Black Adam in Warner Brothers' **Shazam!**, whereas Cavill, of course, is the DCEU's Superman. With that in mind, many have speculated that Cavill's Man of Steel will be turning up to battle Johnson's Black Adam in **Shazam!**. After all, in the comic world we've seen Black Adam and Superman butt heads many a time, and the rogue is one of the few characters who is near-enough just as powerful as the Last Son of Krypton. Also, in 2010 came the impressive **Superman/Shazam!: The Return of Black Adam** animated effort, which wowed many. Right now, though, **Shazam!** has yet to find a director, a Billy Batson, or a Shazam, so the film is still a little way off. **Jack the Giant Slayer**'s Darren Lemke is currently working on the screenplay, with an April 5th, 2019 release date pencilled in. For those not familiar with the Shazam character, young Billy Batson can summon the magical power of the wizard Shazam simply by shouting his name. Billy would then transform into the heroic Captain Marvel, although the hero was later simply known as Shazam as the years progressed. ^{AP}

IT



Scary clown alert as we get a new glimpse of Bill Skarsgård's interpretation of Pennywise in Andy Muschietti's remake of Stephen King's **IT**. The **Mama** director said of the character – made famous by the legendary Tim Curry in the 1990 TV miniseries, "Pennywise shows up, he's front and centre, and he does his show. He has an act."

The official synopsis reads: "In a small town in Maine, seven children known as *The Losers' Club* come face to face with life problems, bullies, and a monster that takes the shape of a clown called Pennywise." Jaeden Lieberher (**Midnight Special**), Finn Wolfhard (**Stranger Things**), Nicholas Hamilton (**Captain Fantastic**), Jack Grazer (**Tales of Halloween**), Wyatt Oleff (**Guardians of the Galaxy**), Chosen Jacobs (**Hawaii Five-0**), and Jeremy Ray Taylor (**Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Road Chip**) make up the club in question and subjects of the clown's reign of terror.

IT – or at least the first half, since the plan is to make it a two-parter – will be in cinemas on September 8th.



A movie about those little smiley things we use on text messages when we want to make sure it's clear that we're being sarcastic? Really? ;) T. J. Miller (*Deadpool's* sidekick Weasel) plays Gene, an emoji who is an outsider since he can actually show more than one expression. The fact professional cockwomble James

Corden is involved as 'Hi-Five', the hand emoji, doesn't fill us with a great deal of confidence, but the casting of the legendary Steven Wright as Mel Meh (Gene's father) is pretty perfect. Expect a family-friendly morality tale about not having to fit in when **The Emoji Movie** (formally subtitled **Express Yourself**) reaches cinemas on August 4th.

MARVEL

With Taika Waititi's **Thor: Ragnarok** on the way this November, a couple of news tidbits have been revealed ahead of the Thunder God's next outing. Not only is Chris Hemsworth's Son of Odin being joined by Mark Ruffalo's Hulk, but now, as hinted at during **Doctor Strange's** post-credits sting, Thor will also be joined by Benedict Cumberbatch's Master of the Mystic Arts. Additionally, it's been confirmed that Sakaar will be featured in the film. What's Sakaar, you ask? Why, it's the gladiatorial planet featured in the famed **Planet Hulk** comic book arc. And how did the Green Goliath end up there in the comics? Well, the Illuminati decided that they needed to send the Hulk into space for the benefit of mankind. Part of that particular incarnation of the Illuminati? That'd be Doctor Strange, acting alongside Namor, Tony Stark, and Professor X. Could we see Cumberbatch's Sorcerer Supreme play a part in getting the Engine of Mass Destruction to Sakaar in **Thor: Ragnarok**? We'll have to wait and see how things develop when the film hits the big screen on November 3rd.

The MCU movie up next after **Ragnarok** is Ryan Coogler's **Black Panther**. And on that topic, this past month has seen the film bring in **The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story's** Emmy-winning Sterling K. Brown as N'Jobi, who is a mysterious figure from the past of Chadwick Boseman's T'Challa. That film is currently set for a February 16th, 2018 release.

One movie that will be arriving before both **Thor: Ragnarok** and **Black Panther** is **Spider-Man: Homecoming**. That adventure will see Tom Holland's wall-crawler swing to cinema screens on July 7th, but Marvel Studios and Sony Pictures have moved to already confirm a release date for **Homecoming's** sequel. The second of a new Spidey trilogy, the yet-to-be-titled sequel has been booked in for July 5th, 2019. As for the third part of this trilogy, logic would suggest that movie to arrive in 2021. Of course, Sony saw their last attempts at a web-head franchise spectacularly blow up in their face once they started to get a little ahead of themselves and announced **The Amazing Spider-Man 3**, **The Amazing Spider-Man 4**, **The Sinister Six**, and **Venom** all before **The Amazing Spider-Man 2** had even been released. Sadly, despite getting us all majorly excited in the build-up, **The Amazing Spider-Man 2** was an utter disaster, spending far too much time laying the foundations for the films that were to come rather than focusing on the story of that particular movie itself. With the structure of the Marvel Cinematic Universe already in place, here's hoping that **Spider-Man: Homecoming** will fare far better than **The Amazing Spider-Man 2**.

Taking things down to the small screen, and to the surprise of nobody, Marvel's Netflix-exclusive **Luke Cage** has been confirmed for a second season. To date, we've previously

seen Charlie Cox's Guardian Devil get two seasons of **Marvel's Daredevil**, whilst a second season of the Krysten Ritter-starring **Marvel's Jessica Jones** has already been given the all-clear. There's no exact premiere date revealed for Season 2 of **Marvel's Luke Cage** just yet, but up next for Mike Colter's Cage will be joining together with **Daredevil**, **Jessica Jones**, and Finn Jones' Iron Fist in **Marvel's The Defenders**, which arrives on Netflix in the second half of this year. ^{AP}



horrorchannel

A round-up of what not to miss this month on Horror Channel...

JANUARY 20TH - ATM (2012)

Not one for claustrophobics, this tense single-location horror sees a group of co-workers trapped in a walk-in cash machine booth by a parka-wearing psychopath.

+++

JANUARY 24TH - COUNTESS DRACULA (1971)

The legendary Ingrid Pitt plays Hammer's version of Countess Elizabeth Báthory, who finds that bathing in virgin's blood makes her regain her youth. It's certainly cheaper than Oil of Ulay or Botox, at least.

+++

FEBRUARY 10TH - TUCKER AND DALE VS. EVIL (2010)

Alan Tudyk and Tyler Labine are the titular bumpkins just minding their own business in a cabin in the woods. That is until a bunch of college kids stumble upon them and assume they are backwoods killers. It's hilarious, and blends the gore (of which there's lots) and shocks with a cute love story that makes it unmissable!

+++

FEBRUARY 13TH - THE SAND (2015)

A fabulously fun creature feature in which a party on the beach ends in a fight for survival as something in the sand is killing the group! Some inventively icky deaths and the inevitable CGI monster are worth catching.

+++

FEBRUARY 15TH - MATINEE! (1993)

Joe Dante's love letter to the days when cinema used to be about showmanship. John Goodman is the William Castle-esque director who releases a monster movie at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis. As well as being a mighty fine movie in its own right, the film-within-a-film **Mant!** is the real draw.

+++

The classic series **Hammer House of Horror** returns to the screens on February 6th for another chance to catch the chilling small screen stories from the studio that terrified the world.

Horror Channel is available on SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138 and TalkTalk 487.

THE SHAPE OF WATER

A new Guillermo del Toro is always something to look forward to and although we know very little about this one other than it being 'a mysterious and magical journey set against the backdrop of Cold War-era America', Doug Jones, del Toro's go-to star of choice, recently revealed a little about what we can expect.

Jones elaborated, "It's not a sci-fi, it's not a genre film, but I am a creature in it. I'm a fish man that's kind of a one-off. I'm an enigma, nobody knows where I came from; I'm the last of my species so I'm like a natural anomaly. And I'm being studied and tested in a U.S. government facility in 1963, so the Russian Cold War is on, the race for space is on, so there's all that backdrop and that undercurrent. I'm being tested for how can they use me for advantages in military or space travel, or my technology - can we make this usable for humans? So they're trying to keep me a secret from the Russians."

Sally Hawkins (**Paddington**) plays Jones' character's love interest, and the film also stars Octavia Spencer (**Zootropolis**) and Michael Shannon (**Man of Steel**'s General Zod). Although we have no firm release date, we've been told to expect **The Shape of Water** later this year.

STAR WARS

With **Rogue One** passing the \$800 million mark after only a few weeks of release, the **Star Wars** juggernaut shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. And while news has been a little thin on the ground for the upcoming movies, rumour has it



that Woody Harrelson has been in talks to join the cast of the upcoming Han Solo standalone movie.

Apparently, he's being lined up to play a mentor of Alden Ehrenreich's young Solo. As well as Ehrenreich on board as the younger take on cinema's most iconic loveable scoundrel, the still-to-be-titled effort will also feature Donald Glover as a young Lando Calrissian and an unknown role for **Game of Thrones'** Emilia Clarke.

To be directed by **The LEGO Movie**'s Phil Lord and Chris Miller, the Han Solo movie will be the second of the series dubbed **A Star Wars Story**. At present, the film is set for a May 25th, 2018 release (although we wouldn't be at all surprised if that is moved to the now-traditional - and lucrative - pre-Christmas slot) and will tell the story of how Han became the scruffy-looking nerf herder we were introduced to in Mos Eisley back in 1977.

Elsewhere, it's been reported that Carrie Fisher had actually already finished all of her work on **Episode VIII** prior to her sadly passing over the Christmas period (see our heartfelt tribute on page 8). It's believed that Leia will have a far larger role in the follow-up to **The Force Awakens** than she did in J. J. Abrams' 2015 movie. The Walt Disney Company and Lucasfilm will not have to address the tragic loss of Fisher until **Episode IX** begins shooting in 2018. At the last word, Fisher's Leia was confirmed to appear in Colin Trevorrow's **Episode IX**, although we'll have to wait and see what route Disney and Lucasfilm will take with this obviously very tender matter.

To be directed by Rian Johnson, **Star Wars: Episode VIII** is set for a December 15th release. AP

AND FINALLY...

Sylvian White (director of the 2010 Vertigo comic adaptation **The Losers**) has been brought on board for **Slender Man**, the feature film version of the popular Internet meme-turned-urban-legend originally created in 2009 by Victor Surge (the alias of one Eric Knudsen) on the **Something Awful** forum. David Birke (**Gacy, 13 Sins**) will be on script duties, with Bradley Fischer, James Vanderbilt, and William Sherak producing for Mythology Entertainment. Screen Gems is in pre-production now. Expect it to creep out audiences in 2018.

+++

Fans of killer doll franchise **Child's Play** will be delighted to know the seventh in the series has just begun production in Winnipeg, Canada. **Cult of Chucky** sees Brad Dourif returning once more as the voice of the possessed doll, with his daughter Fiona reprising her role from the previous - admittedly rather good - outing, **Curse of Chucky** (2014) and, even more excitingly, Alex Vincent, who was the star of the first two movies (and the post-credit sting of **Curse**). All being well, we can expect **Cult of Chucky** to get a home entertainment (that's DVD/Blu-ray/VOD to you) release nearer Halloween.

TTC 433 stories by Martin Unsworth, Andrew Pollard. Edited by Martin Unsworth

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THE KING IS BACK

by Robert Martin

KONG
SKULL ISLAND
PREVIEW

The greatest ape of all is making his way back to the screens in KONG: SKULL ISLAND. STARBURST explores what we can expect...



The poster could be Japanese. A huge beast is silhouetted against a golden sunrise (or possibly sunset), its enormity dwarfing the helicopters and soldiers advancing towards it. There's more than a hint of the East, the water reflecting the sun's red heat as small islands draw your eye towards the creature.

You'd almost think you were about to get a new Godzilla film, and that's no accident. For *Kong: Skull Island* proudly proclaims itself to be from the producers of *Godzilla*, the Gareth Edwards 2014 feature that got a better reception from the critics than it did from the public. And it's no coincidence that they seem so alike.

When you think about it, modern filmmaking has become incredibly adept at doing something that TV has been capable of for a long time. Story arcs are no longer confined to a two-hour movie, the potential of sequels allowing for stories to stretch beyond the confines of one film.

The likes of *Star Wars* changed the game, with its own arc taking in two sequels and three prequels, and franchises such as the *Star Trek* films, *Superman*, *The Lord of the Rings* and various others showing that characters can develop over time and stories can reveal their secrets over years.

But things really changed with *Iron Man*. The film that heralded the arrival of a new type of crossover back in 2008 started something different, something which took story arcs outside the boundaries of mere sequels. *Iron Man*, *Thor*, *Captain America*, and *The Incredible Hulk* all had their own films before joining forces as the Avengers and creating the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Its expansion to take in films featuring *Ant-Man*, the *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *Doctor Strange* and more means that individual characters not only have their own stories to tell, those stories need to fit in with the much bigger picture. It's quite a feat of storytelling.

Currently, Universal are pinning their hopes on something similar. Tom Cruise's *The Mummy* isn't just a reboot, it's potentially the start of a new universe bringing back their old monsters in a series of films that will no doubt culminate in a giant monster off at some point in the near future. Hopefully, that means we can look forward to some *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, and *Wolf Man* mash-up fun.

Kong: Skull Island is the next film to follow this trend. So far, two trailers have been released and, right from the start of the first one, it's clear that the mood for this new version of the King Kong story is a far cry from the sweeping romance of Peter Jackson's love letter to the first great monster of cinema.

As with the best teasers, we get to learn very little from this first trailer. The palette is decidedly 1970s. Military types on a ship. A voice-over insisting it's just a survey job, a joy ride – in and out. But the tone is dark, the music menacing. Stars Tom Hiddleston

and Brie Larson look bright and optimistic as the choppers head towards an ominous skull island. A dragonfly in the foreground looks exactly like the choppers in the background – man vs. nature. And then a palm tree is hurtled through the front of a helicopter and it all turns to hell. From that point on, there are flames - lots of flames - shots of terrified little people looking up at something big, massive skulls and skeletons, sometimes with people using them to hide from something, a huge bloody hand print on the side of a rock, angry natives, men firing guns at something and Sam Jackson and John Goodman providing a little expository information.

And then, Kong. We don't see much, and it's the final shot of the trailer with two men fighting on a cliff edge suddenly stopping as the giant ape's head rises before them, that we get our longest glimpse.

As a teaser it's pretty magnificent.

Cut to trailer number two, where there are some major differences. Firstly, we start off in a lighter mood, *Bad Moon Rising* is the soundtrack. We learn more about what the team are heading to Skull Island for, and how their intrusion could be upsetting the natural balance there. John C. Reilly appears, all pally with the natives, clearly as someone who has been stranded on the island for some time, given the length of his beard. Suddenly there's humour. Whether or not that's a good thing we'll have to wait and see. But the biggest revelations here are the introduction of the hideous and deadly skull crawler creatures, as well as glimpses of other gigantic island inhabitants like a massive water buffalo and a very unpleasant-looking spider.

Of course, and most exciting of all, we see far more of Kong himself. We see him striding like a Goliath through the water as Reilly's voiceover tells us what a good king to the island he has been. We also see his wrath, his enormous fists hammering a smashed helicopter to the ground, and we get a hint of his gentler side via a shot of Larson reaching out to touch a calm beast. And finally, the shot every King Kong film needs, the giant ape beating his chest and roaring in full glory.

It's mightily impressive and sets the tone as one not dissimilar to *Godzilla's* – men against nature, told in solemn style.

Also impressive is the film's cast. Jackson, Reilly and Goodman can all be relied upon to provide solid support to the leads and, as those leads, the film has pulled a blinder with the powerhouse team of Tom Hiddleston and Brie Larson.

Hiddleston is nothing if not varied in his choice of roles, varying effortlessly from independent and arthouse fare like *High-Rise* or *Only Lovers Left Alive* to blockbusters like the *Avengers* films, whilst still maintaining a successful theatrical career as a classical actor. Beside him on Skull Island, Brie Larson brings some serious acting chops with her, Kong being a brave choice of co-star



following her Oscar-winning performance in the brilliant *Room* from 2015. But as she's currently filming *Avengers: Infinity War* and will follow that up starring as *Captain Marvel*, her Kong foray into big budget FX-heavy blockbusters is merely the first of plenty more to come from her.

Writers Dan Gilroy and Max Borenstein provide for an interesting mix. Whist Borenstein is no stranger to this kind of thing, having written *Godzilla* (he's currently writing the sequel), Gilroy's credits suggest that *Skull Island* may have some real bite to its script. He wrote and directed the brilliant *Nightcrawler* from 2014, the disturbing media satire starring Jake Gyllenhaal and Gilroy's wife, Rene Russo. That screenplay got him an Oscar nomination, and his previous writing for the likes of *The Bourne Legacy* shows that he can certainly tackle complexity and action.

Kong: Skull Island is certainly going to look spectacular, as photographed by Larry Fong. His credits include some very fine-looking films indeed, including several with Zack Snyder – *300*, *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*, and *Watchmen*, as well as the fantastic looking *Super 8*. Music comes from Henry Jackman, whose credits include *Kick-Ass*, the *Captain America* films, and *X-Men: First Class*.

Being at the helm of this \$190 million production would be intimidating for anyone, but perhaps doubly so for director Jordan Vogt-Roberts. Most of his work has been in TV. Indeed the only feature to his credit is the wonderful *The Kings of Summer* from 2013. There's nothing at all in his catalogue which makes him an obvious choice for a blockbuster of this size. His credits include documentaries, made for TV movies, episodes of comedy shows and several pieces for *Funny or Die*, so it would seem that his forte is comedy rather than action. Choosing him to direct could be a stroke of genius from the producers, but it's certainly a risky choice. Even the relatively unknown Gareth Edwards had created *Monsters*, almost on his own, before landing *Godzilla*, and even that was seen as a risk. Still, he's done OK for himself, having managed to handle *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* pretty well...

And talking again of *Godzilla*, here's where things get even more interesting. After *Kong: Skull Island*, we can expect *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* in 2019 (written and directed by *Krampus*' Michael Dougherty) and then, in 2020, prepare to wet your pants over *Godzilla vs. Kong*, potentially a film that could make the destruction *Batman vs Superman* brought upon an unsuspecting world look like knocking over your LEGO set.

So, if we see both *Godzilla* and *Kong: Skull Island* as origin films, their mighty clash could be spectacular, but we've a few years to wait.

Quite how the timelines work out though is eyebrow raising. The events of *Kong: Skull Island* take place in the 1970s, whilst *Godzilla* began with the destruction of the Janjira nuclear plant in 1999 before unleashing





the main thrust of the story in the present day, meaning that we can confidently predict that Kong won't die at the end of Skull Island... Unless, of course, there are baby apes involved.

One thing which will be very interesting in the big 2020 clash of the monsters is that, to an extent, both creatures are sympathetic, so siding with one over the other will be no easy thing. After all, *Godzilla* has always been on our side really and we've always rooted for Kong, in all of his incarnations.

Peter Jackson's 2005 version balanced both the menace of the original Kong and the romance of the remake. It was long - really long - and took its meticulous and elegant time to tell its story. It featured some of the most spectacular examples of CGI committed to screen at the time - the fight between Kong and the T-rex and the entire last act in Manhattan are stunningly realised. But it also featured some of the worst, the dinosaur stampede being a classic lesson of when a producer needs to tap a director on the shoulder and tell them that, sometimes, less is more.

But by god, it was romantic, Naomi Watts and Andy Serkis managing to make animal and human love seem like the most natural thing in the world. Anyone who has ever loved and lost a pet was left heartbroken by the end of that film.

There's very little to hint at such romance so far in *Kong: Skull Island*. Pounding action? Oh yes. Terrifying monsters? Not half! Immaculate CGI? We should coco! But a love affair? We'll have to wait and see on that one. Certainly this version of the ape himself is a more muscular and meaner looking beast than Jackson's battered and weary Kong, so who knows where our sympathies will be directed?

There's also no indication here as to whether or not the action stays on Skull Island or gets back to the mainland. Perhaps we have to wait until 2020 for that delight.

One thing is certain, though. With a hefty budget, and a *Godzilla* sequel on the way which has to lead towards the big 2020 battle of the beasts, this version of the Kong story has an awful lot riding on its hairy hulking shoulders.



Take a trip to **KONG: SKULL ISLAND** when it reaches cinemas on March 10th.

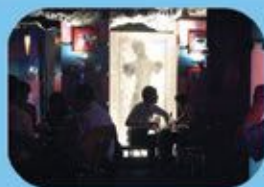


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LIFE OF KONG

by Kieran Fisher

As the great ape appears once more on our cinema screens, **STARBURST** takes a look back at where it all began as well as some of the pretenders to the crown...



Whether depicted as a savage monster, a romantic antihero, a kid-friendly protector or a feminist spoof, King Kong has taken many forms since Merian C. Cooper and Edgar Wallace set him loose on unsuspecting audiences in 1933. The image of the gorilla on top of the Empire State Building is instantly recognisable and immortally iconic. The



film is often cited as the progenitor for the giant monster genre, not to mention an influential cornerstone for science fiction in general. Throughout the years, he's had his imitators and made appearances in everything from *Spider-Man* comics to episodes of *The Simpsons*. When it comes to pop culture landmarks, Kong sits atop a throne unto himself, like the mountain in the exotic island he calls his home. The life of Kong has been a fascinating one, and with *Skull Island* so close you can smell the flames and bamboo shoots, we decided to celebrate our favourite priapic primate's legacy.

The original *King Kong* is arguably the quintessential jungle adventure film, but it wasn't the first motion picture to portray prehistoric beasts or lovelorn primates in far off lands. By 1933, jungle expedition movies had long been established in American cinema; 1913's *Beasts of the Jungle* paved the way for the genre as a couple and their pet tiger fought off a man-eating lion in South Africa. Then, in 1918, cinemagoers would be introduced to one of the most popular pop culture icons to ever emerge from a jungle for the first time in *Tarzan and the Apes*, which would ultimately give birth to a franchise that's still ongoing and successful to this day. However, it wasn't until Harry O. Hoyt's *The Lost World* in 1925 that audiences were treated to fantastical monsters in the wilderness. Based on the 1912 novel of the same name by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle,

the film depicts a land in which dinosaurs still exist and aren't exactly hospitable towards their human guests. *The Lost World* was pivotal in the creation of *King Kong* as it served as the launch pad for Willis O'Brien, whose outstanding ground-breaking stop-motion special effects are on display in both movies, bringing model monsters to life in a way that's still mightily impressive by today's standards. Furthermore, in 1930, audiences were treated to horny apes with *Ingagi*, a Pre-Code exploitation picture in which a tribe of African gorilla-worshippers offer up their own kind as sex slaves to their gods. However, while the DNA of these films can be found all over Skull Island's ancient, terrifying terrains, Kong is and forever will be the undisputed king of the jungle.

The tale of the arduous voyage into uncharted lands has been retold so many times that it's become firmly ingrained in popular consensus. But what's one more for old time's sake? It all begins in New York City with adventurous film director Carl Denham (Robert Armstrong) who, in dire need of a lead for his latest wild opus, convinces penniless and starving actress, Ann Darrow (Fay Wray), to sail with him across the Indian Ocean to a mysterious island to shoot his next project. He promises to make her a star, and as she has nothing better to do in the Big Apple - except perhaps steal food - she accepts his proposition. But it's a wise decision on her part - at least in the beginning - as,

while travelling to the island, she meets handsome sailor Jack Driscoll (Bruce Cabot), and they fall in love and live happily ever after... well not quite. All relationships have their struggles to overcome, but their debacle just happens to be a 20-foot-tall gorilla with consent issues.

Upon their arrival on the island, they stumble upon a ritual taking place at the hands of the natives. They're serving up some poor women to their island god, Kong, but the arrival of Denham and crew ruins it completely. But it's not all doom and gloom as there is a solution to the intruder spoiling their human sacrifice - Ms. Darrow. Naturally, Denham and Driscoll reject their offer and return to their ship, but that doesn't stop the adamant natives from sneaking on board and kidnapping her anyway, because there is just no compromising with primitive types hell bent on pleasing their gargantuan deity - and boy, does he take a liking to the stunning actress or what? What ensues is a journey into a creature-ravaged jungle as Driscoll desperately seeks to bring his woman back from the clutches of her newest suitor. But Denham has plans to bring Kong to New York for his own financial gain...

King Kong is many different things; it's a giant monster adventure movie, an epic fantasy and an adrenaline-fuelled, action-packed romp. But at the heart of it all is a love story, a twentieth-century





retelling of *Beauty and the Beast* albeit without the happily-ever-after ending. This element would be played up further in Peter Jackson's 2005 remake, but it is Kong's affection for Anne in the original film that endeared the monster to fans - which makes his tragic end even more harrowing.

King Kong premiered on March 2nd, 1933 at the New York City Music Hall and the RKO Roxy Theatre simultaneously to a tremendous reception. *Variety* (March 6th, 1933) was full of praise, declaring, 'Kong mystifies as well as it horrifies, and may open up a new medium for scaring babies via the screen.' *The Chicago Tribune* (April 23rd, 1933) was more insightful and even more complimentary, describing it as 'one of the most original, thrilling and mammoth novelties to emerge from a movie studio.' It was also a roaring commercial success for its time, making a record-breaking profit of \$650,000 during its initial run. The film would then go on accumulate further profits with re-releases well into the 1950s, though for later releases some of the film's more horrific scenes were cut until it was fully restored in 1969.

Edgar C. Wallace and Merian C. Cooper captured lightning in a bottle with 1933's *King Kong*, unleashing a gorilla whose paw print will forever be etched in pop culture immortality. Since the film's release, not a decade has passed without its influence being felt in various mediums

of entertainment; whether in his original incarnation or the beasts to ape (pun intended) him, Kong has been a continual source of inspiration for fantastical storytelling since his inception.

Ernest B. Schoedsack, who was an uncredited director on the first movie, was the first filmmaker to capitalise on its success through sequels and copycat fare. The first milking of Kong's hairy proverbial tit arrived the same year of the film's release in the form of forgotten sequel, *Son of Kong*. The story picks up where the first movie left off, with Armstrong reprising his role of Denham. The events of Kong destroying New York haven't been forgotten, so to avoid indictment, Denham embarks on another ocean voyage only to unwittingly end up back on Skull Island warding off dinosaurs with the help of Kong's offspring. Unfortunately, like baby Kong, the film is a pale shadow of its predecessor, though it is not without entertaining merit - a common trait you'll find in much of the offerings to follow Cooper's iconic masterpiece.

The first of the many knock-offs arrived in 1949 courtesy of Schoedsack once more with the highly underrated *Mighty Joe Young*, which was also written and produced by Merian C. Cooper. Essentially the product of the masterminds knocking off their own creation, Robert Armstrong once again plays the role of a green-eyed

promoter who convinces young Jill (Terry Moore) to bring her gorilla Joe - who she's been raising in Africa - to Los Angeles where he'll be the star attraction in Hollywood. But the glitz and glam aren't for Joe, and when he gets drunk and goes a little ape, he's sentenced to death and it's up to Jill to save her pal and return him to his homeland. Remade by Disney in 1998, *Mighty Joe Young* is a fun family-friendly tale with a lot of irresistible charm.

But it isn't just the Americans who know how to deliver a monkey romp. The Brits have quite a comical history with giant gorilla movies, the first of which came in the form of the mighty *Konga*. The story follows the mad scientist Dr. Charles Decker (Michael Gough), who, after returning from an expedition from Africa with a growth serum and a pet chimpanzee, uses his magic potion to have his monkey carry out hits and dispose of his enemies. That is until his assistant, Margaret (Margo Johns), gets jealous of the doctor's womanising and takes out her anger on the world by injecting the poor chimp with a serum overdose, causing it to grow to astronomical sizes and go bananas throughout London.

But if you thought *Konga* epitomised the notion of hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, then you haven't seen *Queen Kong* (1976) - although neither have most people, as those involved in its creation





seemingly distanced themselves from it upon its release. Made to cash in on the much-maligned *King Kong* remake that same year, *Queen Kong* is a spoof of questionable quality, in which old British sex symbol Robin Askwith plays Ray Fay. Essentially a gender swap re-tread of the original with added musical numbers boasting romantic lyrics such as, 'a genie who ain't teeny, she's the queenie queenie for my weeny,' *Queen Kong* culminates with the greatest speech in motion picture history, with Ray proclaiming the Queen's rampage as a metaphor for the liberation of women everywhere.

There have been a few imitators throughout the years, of varying quality. *King of Kong Island* (1968) represents the bottom of the barrel nonsense, a shameless cash-grab only resembling Kong in name alone. However, *A*P*E** (1976) and *The Mighty Gorga* (1969) are the types of shameless exploitation rip-offs that connoisseurs of trash cinema will undoubtedly have a soft spot for. But when it comes to sheer entertainment of the mindless kind, no Kong copycat even comes close to 1977's *The Mighty Peking Man*. Produced by the legendary Shaw Brothers Studios, the film wastes no time with story building; right away we're thrust into the jungle as a posse of poachers seek the mighty ape who inhabits it with his scantily-clad bestie played by Swiss model Evelyn Kraft. The *Mighty Peking Man* is every bit as enjoyable as the

original *King Kong*, embracing the camp lunacy Cooper's classic could have been if helmed by a lesser filmmaker. Roger Ebert (April 30th, 1999) praised it for its 'general goofiness' and 'insane genius'. Released during the prime years of Hong Kong cinema, it's arguably the finest giant monster movie to emerge from Asia outside of the Toho *Godzilla* films.

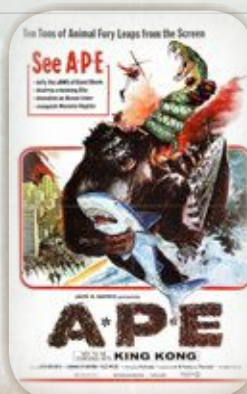
Kong's travels would also take him to Japan in the '60s, when Toho licensed the rights of the character. It all began in 1962, when he fought the only monster you could consider his equal - *Godzilla*. *King Kong vs. Godzilla* isn't regarded as a high point for either franchise, but it's worth seeing just for Kong's newfound electricity powers. Toho would use the character one last time in 1967's *King Kong Escapes*, pitting the beast against his robot counterpart.

The '60s would also see Kong make his debut in animated television as a child-friendly hero, with the Japanese-American co-production *The King Kong Show*. In this series, Kong befriends a family and travels the world saving it from monsters, extraterrestrial invaders and other hazards to humanity. In 1998, he would continue his cartoon adventures with the feature-length, direct-to-video musical *The Mighty Kong*. Starring the voice talents of Dudley Moore and Jodi Benson, the story followed format as the 1933 film, only geared towards younger audiences with a few catchy

songs thrown in for good measure. Kong wouldn't make his animated return until the year 2000 when *Kong: The Animated Series* aired on the Bohbot Kids Network. Short-lived and ill-fated, it would be followed with two spin-off movies in 2005 and 2007 respectively: *Kong: King of Atlantis* and *Kong: Return to the Jungle*. In 2016, Kong's animated exploits continued with the Netflix-produced web series *Kong: King of Apes*, a wildly entertaining futuristic 'on the lam' adventure where Kong is framed by a mad scientist who is hell bent on unleashing a robotic dinosaur apocalypse.

Of course, like most popular franchises, *King Kong* has been given the remake treatment. The first came in 1976 and left a sour taste in audience mouths at the time. Hyped for months by producer Dino De Laurentiis as the greatest thing since sliced bread, featuring a 40-foot robot gorilla designed by special effects master Carlo Rambaldi, it arrived on the back of massive expectations - and it flopped.

However, it's not a bad movie; it embodies the definition of a mindless, unnecessary remake, but aside from a dodgy script there isn't anything inherently wrong with *King Kong '76* other than failed promises made by a delusional producer. The promised robot only featured for a few moments, and it was mocked and subsequently deleted from home video releases; for most of the running time Kong was played



KONG IN A KILT?

by John Knott



Ras any self-respecting Loch Ness tour guide will tell you, the earliest known sighting of the Loch Ness Monster was in 565 AD when it was scared off by Saint Columba making the sign of the cross at it. But as we're neither tour guides nor particularly self-respecting, we're going to be spoilsports and tell you that the incident in question was actually on the River Ness (rather than the Loch) and that every respectable 6th century saint saw off a water-beastie at some point or another during their beatified careers.

So when was the Monster actually first seen? Well, Aleister Crowley lived at Boleskine House on the shores of Loch Ness from 1899 to 1913 and, as you might suspect, reported no end of rum goings-on. But mention of a monster is somewhat noticeable by its absence. In fact, when you bear in mind most large bodies in Europe had some kind of legend (scholars suspect the Saint Columba story was an imported re-hash), Loch Ness was actually pretty short of monster sightings. There was the odd bit of kelpie folklore, the occasional upturned boat, maybe something a bit big and fishy but that was your lot. No actual monsters. So when the *Inverness Courier* reported that a Mrs Aldie Mackay had seen something big and strange on the loch in 1933, it was slightly surprising that journalist Alex Campbell not only described it as a monster but he also referred to it as

the monster as if everyone was already well aware of it. He said it had been seen 'again' as if this was some kind of regular appearance and even chucked in some previous sightings of a 'large seal' or a 'porpoise' for good measure. Captain John MacDonald was so baffled that he felt obliged to write in and say he'd made 20,000 trips on the loch over fifty years and not only had he never seen the monster, he'd never even heard of it.

But the story certainly had an effect. When Fleet Street heard, the shores of the loch were soon crawling with Sassenach journalists drinking whiskey and mixing with the locals to find their own monster tale. Loch Ness had only recently become easily accessible when the A82 along the north side had been completed. Within months, there were stories of monsters crossing the road in front of cars and motorbikes. Suddenly, everyone had heard the legend of the Loch Ness Monster even if though the legend was only a couple of weeks old. *The Daily Mail* was hiring big-game hunters to track it down and obviously everyone wanted a photograph. Nessiemanian had taken hold and the place was heaving with tourists. Today, the Loch Ness Monster is world-famous and has been 'legendary' 83 years.

But why did Mrs Mackay's sighting make it to the illustrious pages of the *Courier*

in the first place? Why were the London hacks so interested? It all gets a bit clearer when you realise that Mrs Mackay actually saw whatever she saw on April 14th, 1933. It was the very weekend that *King Kong* opened in London. 'Lost world' novels by the likes of Arthur Conan Doyle and Edgar Rice Burroughs were already popular and had started to make it into film with *The Lost World* (1925) but *King Kong* was huge (and we don't mean just because he was 50-foot-tall) with a cultural impact not dissimilar to *Star Wars* 40-odd years later. Mrs McKay saw something peculiar the same weekend that monsters were gripping popular culture so it's no surprise Alex Campbell monstered-up her story and added the trappings of legend for the *Courier*, and it's equally unsurprising Fleet Street latched on. That's what people wanted to read about. So, in reality, it was Kong who gave birth to Nessie and grateful Inverness tourist guides have been doing a roaring trade ever since.

Well that's what we think. Some will dispute all this and many tourist guides certainly won't have it (and yes, we have asked some) but next time you watch the otherwise brilliant 1970 film *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, just ask yourself what was the point in Christopher Lee disguising his submarine as a monster the Victorians had never even heard of? Told you we were spoilsports...

S. COURIER. TUESDAY, MAY 24, 1933.

D ORPHANAGE

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he Trustees

ONS TO SCHEME

the monthly meeting of the
Council, it was unanimously
the draft scheme of the
elementary (Scotland) Com-
mission to the government of the
King.

Macdonald, in main

STRANGE SPECTACLE ON LOCH NESS

What was it?

(FROM A CORRESPONDENT.)

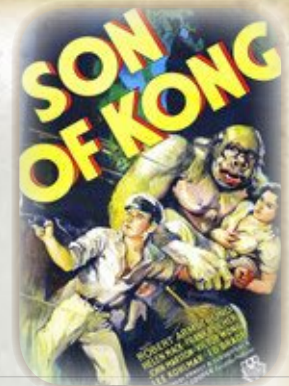
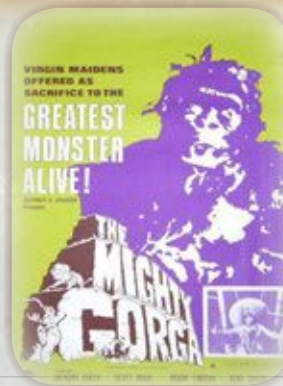
Loch Ness has for generations been credited
with being the home of a fearsome-looking
monster, but, somehow or other, the "water-
kelpie," as this legendary creature is called, has
always been regarded as a myth, if not a joke.
Now, however, comes the news that the beast
has been seen once more, for, on Friday of last
week, a well-known business man, who lives

CORRESPONDENT

INVERNESS TOWN CO
THE MAN OF THE HOUR

TO THE EDITOR OF THE IN-
VERNESS TOWN CO.—May I crave space
columns to express my sur-
or his regard, which *Courier*
has made in your last issue
justified protest against the
meeting of the Highland
instead of replying to my
parently come out of his
I think, a most unjust
back on the matter.





by an uncredited Rick Baker in a suit. Another problem for audiences was that the film was set in contemporary times and failed to retain the classic feel that made the original film special to them. Aside from the updated time period and an island expedition revolving around a greedy oil company as opposed to a filmmaking crew, it doesn't stray too far from the Kong story we all know and love. On its own merits, this remake is uncomplicated fun.

On the other hand, Peter Jackson's 2005 remake righted the perceived wrongs of the '76 version by setting the story during the Great Depression. Jackson originally wanted to reboot Kong in the '90s, but at the time no studio was interested in returning to Skull Island. But then *Lord of the Rings* happened and became a monumental success, essentially giving Jackson free reign over his projects for the rest of his career. Burnt out on Middle Earth, he once again proposed twentieth-century New York and the jungles of Kong's habitat and the project was greenlit.

The 2005 *King Kong* retreads the original almost step-for-step, but it fleshes the story out more and enhances every aspect of it. That's not to say it's a better film, but it reinterpreted the story perfectly for modern audiences. The journey to Skull Island is beset with more dangers, the dangers on the island

itself are more frequent and savage, and the love story between Ann and Kong is heightened. Clearly made with a strong affinity for the original, but funneled through the vision of one of Hollywood's most visionary directors, Jackson's *King Kong* is a wonderful adaptation that thrills with its action and touches with its heart.

King Kong also marked the beginning of the popularisation of movie novelisations. In 1932, prior to the film's release and in a bid to generate some hype, Delos W. Lovelace's story provided a well-written companion piece to the upcoming spectacle, which mostly follows the script albeit removing much of the focus from Denham. For many during the Great Depression of the '30s, going to the cinema wasn't such an affordable luxury; therefore, the novelisation was the only way to embark on these cinematic adventures until they were shown on public television. Like most popular horror, fantasy and science fiction fare throughout the years, a novelisation has accompanied a major Kong release ever since. Additionally, he's also appeared in comic books since the 1930s; both in his own series' and appearances in crossovers.

The life of Kong has been an eventful one, and it's impossible to fit it all into a few pages. When we see him in his next cinematic iteration, eighty-four years will

have passed since he first thrilled, terrified, then stole the hearts and imaginations of audiences in New York City on that fateful night in 1933. Like the Universal Monsters, Godzilla and the superheroes who continue to be re-introduced to new generations, Kong will always be a staple in pop culture. Skull Island, for all its primordial dangers, is a place we'll always want to revisit, and seeing Kong there will feel like catching up with an old friend.



HAIL THE FAMOUS MONSTER

By Michael Coldwell



He was KING KONG's greatest fan, a pioneering collector of movie memorabilia and a friend (and occasional foe) to everyone and anyone in SF. In the history of imaginative fantasy, no one did more to promote and celebrate its possibilities than the man known variously as '4E', 'FJA' 'The Ack' or 'Forry'. That's a lot of nicknames, but then there were many facets to FORREST J ACKERMAN.

The story of how a regular kid from L.A. came to invent fandom as we know it began the day in 1926 when, idling at a newsstand on Santa Monica Boulevard, his nine-year-old eye was caught by the vividly garish cover of a brand new magazine called *Amazing Stories*. The world's first dedicated science fiction magazine was swiftly purchased (the diminutive 'sci-fi' was later coined by Forry himself after he saw the word 'hi-fi' and thought, 'umm...'). From that point on, he consumed and archived every SF magazine and book he could lay his hands on. By the age of 15, Forry was in regular correspondence with over a hundred of the

sci-fi visionaries whose work he devoured – people like *King Kong* author Edgar Rice Burroughs, whose encouraging letters helped crystallise Forry's conviction that an enthusiasm for SF could become a life's work.

His love of fantasy film had been fuelled by highly accommodating parents who allowed him to practically live in the cinema, watching hundreds of movies a year. Everything with the vaguest fantasy connotation was viewed, but the films that cast the most hypnotic spell were those containing monsters. The 'Universal Monsters' series and the ground-breaking stop-motion masterpiece that was *King Kong* were such pivotal experiences that when he began to build his legendary collection of movie memorabilia in earnest, it was material from these films he coveted most.

For a generation of adolescent kids growing up in the mid to late 20th Century, his name meant one thing: *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. First appearing in 1958, it was the daddy of sci-fi film and TV magazines and a particular debt of love to monster movies. He edited and contributed to the magazine in its original run until 1983 (it's still running today) while at the same time authoring a vast array of SF books, anthologies and short stories. Not that any of this counted as his 'day job'; that was as literary agent to the cream of SF

writing talent including Ray Bradbury (whose career he nurtured from the beginning), Isaac Asimov, and A.E. Van Vogt. Although he loved science fiction, he was also a sceptic. In a rare lapse of judgement, when representing L. Ron Hubbard, he passed up the chance to give him a good slap and talking to... dang.

The next thing that generation of kids remember about Forry is the astounding collection of fantasy memorabilia that took over the basement of the suburban house he called 'the Ackermansion' (his wife was tolerant, but no way was she having his collection above ground). Starting in 1951, he hosted a regular Sunday 'open house', free of charge to anyone who turned up on his doorstep. Word spread fast among the fledgling fan community; it's estimated that over the years upward of 50,000 people received a personalised tour of this temple to the imagination, stuffed to the gills with books, toys, magazines, posters and thousands of carefully filed still photographs. Best of all were the original props, masks and costume pieces he had gleaned from the major studios nearby. By displaying his collection in this way, Forry tapped into the fundamental desire of genre fans to own a piece of the movies and TV shows they adored, even if just in replica form.

Not that Forry cared much for replica merchandise when he owned such





incredible original items as the fighting dinosaur models and giant gorilla paw from *King Kong*, Lon Chaney's personal make up kit, Bella Lugosi's *Dracula* ring, Mr Spock's ears and the creeping hand from *The Thing*. Sometimes though, necessity intervened. Unable to procure the original full size Robotrix, the astonishing automaton centrepiece of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* on account of it being burned at the stake in that movie's finale, he commissioned two chaps to spend a year-and-a-half constructing a perfect replica to take pride of place in his collection.

He may have blazed a trail for the modern day uber-collector, but in one important respect, Forry differed from today's look-don't touch herberts with their 527 blister-packed *Doctor Who* figurines sitting sadly unopened on IKEA shelf units up and down the land. That's right: go ahead people, they won't bite, pick them up, have a sniff, see how they work; what the hell, you only live once, right? Of course, this admirably enlightened attitude sometimes meant a few unfortunate breakages occurred but it was worth it to see thousands of happy faces trailing out of his house come Sunday evening.

One section of the basement he didn't point out quite so often to visitors (but he was no less proud of) housed his extensive hoard of high-end lesbian erotica. An enthusiastic

champion of sapphic literature and photography, he branched out into writing what he maintained was the world's first lesbian science fiction story ('Kiki') under the pseudonym 'Laura Jean Urmayne'. Continuing the crusade, in 1969, he was inspired by Roger Vadim's pansexual *Barbarella* to co-create Vampirella, the iconic and enduring kick-ass lady blood sucker.

Let's end this whirlwind tour of the Aker-legend with a final, astonishing 'first'. In 1939, the twenty-two-year-old Forry turned up at the very first World Science Fiction Convention dressed in what he called a 'futuristicostume' hoping others would have the same idea. But no one else had. Blushing somewhat in embarrassment, he consoled himself with one vital fact: he'd just invented cosplay.

Shortly before he passed in 2008 at the age of 92, Forry said he hoped he would be remembered as the world's greatest fan of science fiction. Back of the net, sir.



Poetry in Stop-Motion

by
Jack Bottomley



So we don't get carried away with the abundance of CGI and digital, we take a look at an enduring form of animation and how it has developed over the years...

No matter what direction cinema heads, old-school techniques are still present; for instance, we are living in a golden age of animated film with polished CGI, but traditional hand-drawn animation is alive and well. However, when we speak of tradition, stop-motion animation is a century-old technique. From the pioneers who used this painstaking craft to create special effects in live-action film to the animation greats who used (and still use) stop-motion to show just what can be accomplished with hard work and hand-crafted passion, stop-motion is gratifying to see onscreen. To watch a feature that utilises the technique is to be invited into the world of an animator - who slowly moves and records their creations over the course of weeks and months - and to enjoy the collective effort of talented voices in cinema, who use the classical art forms to break new ground and push themselves and their industry. So, to see how far stop-motion has

come, let's go back to the beginning, when this breed of animation was born and when cinema was in its infancy.

The actual beginning is often attributed to Georges Méliès who, in autumn 1898, while shooting a simple street scene, rectified a camera jam. However, once he developed the footage, he found that this mistake had made objects on the film 'magically' disappear, reappear, and transform... history was born. In many ways, stop-motion was really born of 'moving pictures', back when these 'supernatural' screen effects were often constructed by actual magicians. Méliès would go on to use stop-motion to wow early audiences and the first actual stop-motion animated short is cited as Vitagraph Studios' *The Humpty Dumpty Circus*. This 1898 silent animation is lost today (only stills remain) but J. Stuart Blackton's film starring circus dolls and animal toys was unknowingly the origin of

a craft that would forgo the classification of special effect or magic trick and become a major part of the cinematic narrative.

In the following years, Méliès' use of the medium, on everything from title cards to fantasy sequences saw the director perfect techniques like the substitution splice (a spin-off effect of the stop-motion discovery); he used this film cut effect to make his cinematic worlds more miraculous, his seminal 1902 film *A Trip To The Moon* being one prime example. However, these years of invention also saw a list of directors and films from across the globe delve into the enchantment of stop-motion tricks. Blackton's 1907 short *The Haunted Hotel* was an example, and was one of the first horror films in many ways, (though Méliès arguably holds that distinction with his *The Haunted Castle* (1896), as the film saw a ghostly presence move objects.



Segundo de Chomón's *El hotel eléctrico* (1908) followed suit and the art only grew in popularity, as it constantly shocked and amazed audiences now fully invested in this young medium.

Names like Walter R. Booth (whose 1912 film *Modelling Extraordinary* was one of the first to use clay - a method that would over half a century later become 'claymation') and Helena Smith Dayton (the first female animator) were explorers of what was capable, as Russian animator and filmmaker Vladislav Starevich (also written as Władysław Starewicz) became a pioneer for this method, even creating the first recorded puppet stop-motion in *The Beautiful Lukanida* (1912). This was an era of advancement and as the world grew more turbulent and laden with danger and war, it also began brimming with even more imagination and onscreen technical wizardry. However, after years of being used as a tool in which to engross an audience craving out-of-this-world entertainment, stop-motion would soon become more, as it would breed characters and cease being an accompaniment to the plot, instead becoming ingrained in the narrative of the pictures.

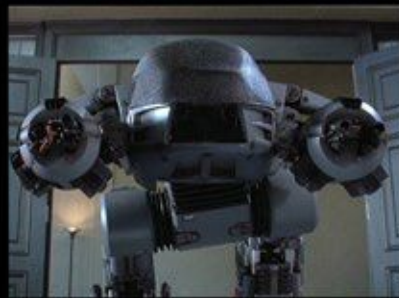
Starting with the likes of the cut-out stop-motion 1917 film *El Apóstol* (cited as the first animated feature film) and later Lotte Reiniger's silhouette animation and colour tint-using *The*

Adventures of Prince Achmed (1926), this shift came to later be championed by the ground-breaking work of special effects genius Willis O'Brien. O'Brien took his early fascination with dinosaurs (1915's live-action silent comedy *The Dinosaur and the Missing Link: A Prehistoric Tragedy*) and engrained his name in history with Harry Hoyt's *The Lost World* (1925). Based on Arthur Conan Doyle's 1912 novel, the film was a hit, but this was down to the thrilling stop-motion sequences that brought the dinosaurs to full, terrifying and ravenous life. However, O'Brien's craft would reach its apex with his rendering and bringing to life of the towering ape in Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack's 1933 milestone *King Kong*. Inspiring countless other works in the monster subgenre, as well as being remade twice and set for a reboot (see page 16), this film was action-packed, poignant and frightening, with a thrilling tower-top finale, however - not to discredit the work of the directors - O'Brien's achievement has gone on to mark this down as 'his movie'. The title primate was the film's antihero of sorts and thanks to the craftsman's mastery of this animated approach, he spawned a living, breathing character and predated what stop-motion (or animation as a whole) would grow to become in the future.

Kong was the turning point, as this character would break down barriers for what animation could accomplish and for how film could use stop-motion as a way to create fantastical beasts

and characters. In O'Brien's following work, he continued to create, with the likes of similarly simian-starring *Mighty Joe Young* (1949) (for which he was awarded an Oscar for Best Visual Effects - which was initially presented to producer Merian C. Cooper, who instead gave the statue to O'Brien) and his thrilling dinosaur sequences in 1956 documentary film *The Animal World*. And it was during this period that the animated style truly began to be validated. In the corresponding decades it would be O'Brien's protégé Ray Harryhausen (who worked with O'Brien closely on the aforementioned films) who would carry on taking stop-motion to even more innovative heights. Harryhausen is to stop-motion what William Shakespeare is to playwrighting, his decades-spanning work on such fantasy epics as *It Came From Beneath The Sea* (1955), *Jason and The Argonauts* (1963), *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad* (1973) and even his later work like *Clash Of The Titans* (1981), which came along at a time when stop-motion animation could have become a more





antiquated form of SFX, remains iconic, as do the characters and monsters he designed for the silver screen. However, times were a-changin' and with the arrival of bigger blockbusters off the back of financial tidal waves like Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) and George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977) (heard of those, anyone?), the direction and presentations of the big screen were altering.

Throughout this time, looking at it in broad terms, you might think stop-motion would slowly decrease in popularity thanks to the rise of the machines (sounds foreboding, doesn't it?), but this category of animation and accompaniment to storytelling never ceased. In fact, it left a mark on some of the biggest films that would come along in this era of landmark movies. Throughout the '70s, the early work by the pioneers began to impact a whole new generation of artists and filmmakers, who felt compelled to continue in the footsteps of their stop-motion heroes. There were some especially psychedelic works like *Dougal* and *The Blue Cat* (1970), a feature film adaptation of the much-loved *The Magic Roundabout* TV series. However, claymation seemed to especially flourish, as names like Eliot Noyes Jr. (*Clay*, or *Origin of Species*, 1964) and Bob Gardiner and Will Vinton (*Closed Mondays*, 1974 - the first stop-motion to win the Best Animated Short Film Oscar) would create a more sophisticated form of clay-based stop-motion. At the same time, here in Blighty, the character of Morph arrived on our TV screens, stealing the show in his appearances on BBC's *Take Hart* and thus kick-starting Aardman Animation, who would later come to define claymation. Morph really was evocative of O'Brien's Kong and Harryhausen's creatures, as he was a fully rounded character and not just an effect.

Even in the major film releases of the '80s, the thumbprints of this classic animated expression were evident. See the model motion movement effect, named 'Go-Motion', innovated by Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) and Phil Tippett, which brought everything from *The Empire Strikes Back*'s AT-



AT walkers, to the ED-209 in Paul Verhoeven's balls-out 1987 sci-fi satire *Robocop*, or the menacing T-800 in the climax of James Cameron's action sci-fi *The Terminator* (1984) to life. Many features big (*Ghostbusters*, *Aliens*, *Evil Dead II*) and small (cult horrors *Puppet Master* and *Piranha*) used variants of stop-motion, ahead of the style's breakout success that followed in the early 1990s, which saw stop-motion become its own genre.

This was arguably a result of work like that of Aardman Animation's Nick Park who, as well as creating cunning Oscar winning British mockumentary short *Creature Comforts* (1989), which later became a TV series, also created two of stop-motion animation's greatest characters in the eccentric cheese-loving British inventor Wallace and his loyal dog Gromit. Wallace and Gromit first starred in Park's 1989 short *A Grand Day Out* (also nominated for the very Oscar *Comforts* would win - show off!) and with Peter Sallis' brilliant vocal work

and the timeless clay-moulded majesty of this story, this has become a staple of the bank holiday TV schedule. These characters have gone on to inspire a following unlike any other stop-motion work, with 1993's *The Wrong Trousers*, 1995's *A Close Shave*, 2008's *A Matter of Loaf and Death* and their very own splendid 2005 feature, *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*. However, as the '90s progressed, this British institution was not the only stop-motion with its own cultural impact.

Director Tim Burton has always been one for this technique and in 1993, his story and characters came to life in one of the greatest ever stop-motion films in the cross-seasonal classic *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. Often confused as being a Burton directed picture, as Burton's love of stop-motion was already evident in sequences of *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* (1985) and *Beetlejuice* (1988), *Nightmare* was actually helmed by the similarly Gothically-inclined Henry Selick. The characters in Selick's musical masterpiece





have gone on to leave an indelible imprint on culture and feature heavily in Gothic youth culture. It was probably at this point that stop-motion animation really became a genre in itself and one that boasted a meticulous charm next to the constantly increasing digital world. Selick would also helm an adaptation of Roald Dahl's *James and The Giant Peach* (1996) using the same puppet stylings, just as Aardman continued their claytastic ways with feathered jailbreak movie *Chicken Run* (2000). It is safe to say that the '90s really shot stop-motion to some cultural highs and the work of Aardman, Burton and Selick can take much credit.

Despite entering the new millennium, the technique continued to impress and, in its own unique way, push the envelope. Burton would direct his own stop-motion features in the brilliant *Corpse Bride* (2005) and the vastly underrated *Frankenweenie* (2012), the latter of which tipped its hat to the early days of horror cinema and was bravely presented in black and white. Each of these films again used this animation to enforce a specific style and bring to life (so to speak) some ghoulish characters. This is often the case for contemporary stop-motion, as the style is often used to create much darker and edgier stories, both for adults (2009's affecting Aussie claymation *Mary and Max* and Israel's stop-motion drama *\$9.99*) and for family audiences (madcap Belgian animation *A Town Called Panic* (2009), Wes Anderson's slickly whimsical Dahl adaptation *The Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009), Aardman's referential *The Pirates! In An Adventure with Scientists!* (2012) and *The Shaun The Sheep Movie* in 2015). In fact,

stop-motion films like this year's under-seen Charlie Kaufman and Duke Johnson drama *Anomalisa*, are a sign of just how sophisticated both the art and the stories it brings to the screen have become.

But a studio that has come to stand at the forefront of this progression is Laika. Starting out in 2005, with Henry Selick's internationally award-winning short *Moongirl*, this studio has specialised in stop-motion, and over the course of just eleven years, has been ranked alongside Studio Ghibli, Walt Disney Animation Studios, and Pixar. The first feature from the company was also directed by Selick, the dark family fairy tale *Coraline* (2009), which was a spellbinding debut that hit the ground running for what Laika were capable of. Then, in 2012, came Sam Fell and Chris Butler's family horror/comedy *ParaNorman*, a lovingly crafted tribute to the zombie genre and again an example of a stop-motion embracing earlier forms of cinema. In 2014, Graham Annable and Anthony Stacchi's *The Boxtrolls* and its Dickensian visuals, imbued with ideology and hefty themes, really did take things a step further in terms of story, character, and ambition. However, it was this year that Laika truly floored us with their breathlessly original and endlessly stunning *Kubo and The Two Strings*. Critically acclaimed (despite not soaring at the box office - for shame!) and already garnering Oscar buzz and a Golden Globe nomination, Travis Knight's film cherished the ancient mythological lore of the earliest stories and legends and with this century-

old cinema technique, *Kubo* is an appropriate final stop for our look at how stop-motion has advanced.

Over the years, cinema has matured and sought to be visually faultless and tackle heavier issues pertaining to the even madder world surrounding the cinematorium, and through all these years of advancement, you'd have thought that stop-motion may have gone the way of smell-o-vision or red/blue tint 3D, but this is a form of cinema that has only grown richer in its depth and output. When early pioneers of film used stop-motion as an almost illusionary device to flabbergast an audience, it's incredible to see their technique become a genre itself and create characters as diverse as Feathers McGraw (*Wallace & Gromit: The Wrong Trousers*) and Archibald Snatcher (*The Boxtrolls*). Perhaps some recent stop-motion films have not soared financially (which is a travesty if you ask this writer) but those same movies have later amassed feverish followings, as audiences crave creativity and in the world of stop-motion creativity is a speciality that's visible in every joint of a puppet, fingerprint in the clay or movement of the cut-out. And we cannot wait to see what comes next...





KEEPING THE LEGEND ALIVE...

**WE SPEAK TO JOHN WALSH AND
CONNOR HEANEY OF THE RAY
HARRYHAUSEN FOUNDATION.**

WORDS AND PICTURES BY ROBERT MARTIN

STARBURST recently attended the Manchester Animation Festival held at HOME, and caught up with our friends John Walsh (Trustee) and Connor Heaney (Collections Manager) from the RAY HARRYHAUSEN FOUNDATION. We asked them a few questions and admired the friends they'd brought along...

STARBURST: What does the Ray Harryhausen Foundation do?

John Walsh: The Foundation preserves the physical assets of Ray's creature collection and maintains the legacy of his work and influence on the world of animation and cinema. With the total number of items in the collection estimated at 50,000, this makes it one of the largest and most complete film collections anywhere in the world outside of the Walt Disney Company.

Ray threw nothing away so there's a lot of material to be cared for. How is that funded?
The Foundation receives no public funding so it is important that we get to speak about the work we do and charge a small fee for this. These funds go directly to the work of the Foundation's preservation and restoration programme. This is an ongoing project with the level of creature decay or exhibition requests pushing some of the creatures to the head of the make-over queue.

How did you both become involved?

I've known Ray since I was a film student at the London Film School when I was eighteen years old. I made a documentary about him entitled *Ray Harryhausen: Movement into Life*. I shot it on 16mm film but have now remastered it in HD and with stereo sound for the first time. I also managed to get former *Doctor Who* and star of Ray's *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*

Tom Baker to narrate it for me. The film is now part of the Foundation's collection and can be seen at talks I give such as this one at the Manchester Animation Festival. I kept in touch with Ray and recorded commentaries for most of his films with him before he died.

Connor Heaney: I had previously studied Archaeology and then worked for the National Collection of Aerial Photography, which holds one of the world's largest archives of reconnaissance imagery from World War II. In particular, I'd worked on a project that provided photography for a major documentary screened during the Edinburgh Film Festival during the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

I'd grown up on Ray Harryhausen films - my mum is a huge fan - but could never have imagined that I would one day be working with the creatures I'd enjoyed so much as a kid! Luckily for me, my experience in working with archives was exactly what the trustees were searching for as they looked towards celebrating Ray's centenary in 2020. It's a dream job, and a real honour to deal with Ray's incredible collection on a day-to-day basis.

There are many projects that never made it to a completed film. At the 2016 STARBURST International Film Festival held in Manchester in August 2016, you showed footage from some of them, including an amazing-looking version of *The War of the Worlds*. Of them, which stand out as great losses to the world of fantasy cinema?

JW: In the case of *The War of the Worlds*, this was conceived as tripod invaders as H. G. Wells imagined them. It would have been marvellous to have seen them stride across the landscape. The George Pal film that came out a few years later had the Martian invaders on a series of marionette-style controllers. That film did win an Oscar for special effects and still stands up well today, but I think had Ray

got there first, his would have been the definitive version.

CH: I would have to agree with John that Ray's vision of *The War of the Worlds* would have been magnificent to see, given his plan to stick very closely to the original text. The vast amount of key drawings, storyboards and model designs for the project show how much work Ray had invested into the story. Given that the test footage was shot in the late 1940s, before his first solo film *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*, it's interesting to ponder how differently his career may have turned out had this project been given the green light.

Another fascinating 'Lost Treasure' is *Force of the Trojans*, which was set to be the follow up to *Clash of the Titans* in the mid-'80s. Again, we have so much

material for the film, ranging from key drawings to screenplays, storyboards, location shots and even clay models of unfinished creatures. This film would have been absolutely packed with stop-motion sequences, including a tribe of Cyclops, the Sphinx, Furies, Hecate, Scylla, and Charybdis, drawing from Roman mythology in much the same way that *Clash* did for Greek legends. However, after more than four decades of tireless stop-motion animation, Ray decided to retire on a high - *Clash of the Titans* being one of his most successful pictures to date.

Which of his films do you think has had the biggest influence on you both and on fantasy cinema in general?

JW: For me, it's *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*. The mix of creatures, action, and black magic was a forerunner for much of today's cinema from *The Lord of the Rings* to *Harry Potter*. Plus, it eventually brought Tom Baker to the attention of *Doctor Who* producer Barry Letts, who was looking for a replacement for Jon Pertwee. He would not have been cast as the definitive Doctor had he not appeared in this film.

CH: From my point of view, *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* represents such a 'big bang' moment: not just in Ray's career, but for the history of special effects and fantasy films. The first colour stop-motion movie, packed with different creatures, with its mythological setting and fantastic music from Bernard Herrmann, it seems to be a film which inspired an entire generation of directors and special effects artists. George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, James Cameron, John Landis, Phil Tippett, Peter Jackson and so many others have described their feelings as they watched this incredible film for the first time. I love to imagine what it must have been like to see this stunning



adventure on screen back in 1958.

The film continues to inspire to this day. I presented a screening of *7th Voyage* to a cinema packed with kids between five to ten years old this year at the Glasgow Film Theatre, and they absolutely loved it! It was so encouraging to see such a young audience sitting on the edge of their seats, cheering along to a film that is almost sixty years old now, and I was completely mobbed with questions about stop-motion animation and Ray Harryhausen after the film.

Do you each have a favourite artefact?

JW: Hard to choose a single one but I am a big fan of Bubo the owl. He is one of the few non-malevolent creatures within the collection and is also a big hit with fans when we tweet a picture.

CH: For very different reasons, I love the Cyclops from *7th Voyage* and the original saucers from *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* the most. There is very little of the Cyclops left - just the armature, and even that is missing a leg - but even still, it's a model that has such a unique presence, and I get a shiver down my spine every time I pick it up.

On the other hand, the flying saucers have not changed in sixty years - they're made of metal, so will outlive myself and John, let alone the rest of the collection. It's incredible to see them in perfect condition, considering how influential their iconic design has been on subsequent alien invasion movies.

Any final comments?

JW: 2016 has seen anniversary screenings, talks and presentations by us for three of Ray's films. *Clash of the Titans* - 35th anniversary, *One Million Years B.C.* - 50th anniversary and *Earth vs the Flying Saucers* - 60th anniversary. As we start making plans for 2017, we already have requests for screenings and talks for the next two anniversaries: *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger*, which is forty years old, and the 60th anniversary of *20 Million Miles to Earth*. This will be screened in colour, something that Ray himself supervised.

CH: Do check out our Ray Harryhausen Podcast - we've published more than ten episodes this year, packed with interviews, competitions, film anniversary celebrations and, most excitingly, previously unheard interview clips with Ray. One of my favourites has been our STARBURST Film Festival special, where we chatted with Harryhausen actresses Caroline Munro and Martine Beswick alongside many of the other guests and attendees of the festival. We're always looking for show ideas from fans, so if there's an aspect of Ray's career you'd like to see us cover, get in touch!

Find out more about the foundation's work at rayharryhausen.com.

The Manchester Animation Festival (manchesteranimationfestival.co.uk) will return to HOME in 2017.

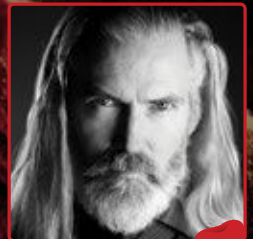




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"Nature made me a freak.
Man made me a weapon.
And God made it last too long." - Logan

Logan's Last Stand

by Andrew Pollard

After a whopping nine movies, it's finally time for Hugh Jackman to call it a day as everyone's favourite furball, WOLVERINE but he's not going out without a bang! Promising to give fans something truly special, James Mangold's LOGAN looks to finally give us a Wolverine movie that this most beloved of comic book characters deserves. So, spike up your hair, dust off your claws, stir up that Berserker Rage and let us get you up to speed on all you need to know about the swansong of one of modern cinema's most iconic characters.

Origins

First and foremost, what you'll see in the follow-up to Mangold's criminally underrated *The Wolverine* is a movie that pulls certain elements from a comic book arc called *Old Man Logan*. A fan favourite tale from Mark Millar, which ran from June 2008 until September 2009, *Old Man Logan* centred on an aged Logan who was struggling with life in a post-apocalyptic future landscape. With the United States having been toppled by supervillains and split into four territories, the world, much like Wolverine himself, is a complete mess. In fact, *Wolverine* isn't actually *Wolverine* by the time *Old Man Logan* comes around. What we'd come to learn is that the reason no other X-Men exist in this time is largely due to an attack on the X-Mansion by a group of forty no-good supervillains. Luckily, Wolvie would turn up and launch a brutal, bloody assault on these rogues, killing each and every one of them and saving the day. Well, that's what our claw-swiping hero thought, but it was soon tragically revealed that *Wolverine* had actually killed every single one of his fellow X-Men. Courtesy of an illusion from Mysterio, ol' Canucklehead had been duped in to committing a most heinous (Bill and Ted represent, yo!) act on his mutant brothers and sisters. Broken down emotionally, *Wolverine* attempted to take his own life by letting a train hit him. Unfortunately for him, his body would regenerate and recover, but from that day forward *Wolverine* was dead; instead he was now merely Logan.



So, we skip forward to a time when the please-don't-call-me-Wolverine is a shell of his former self, living in a territory run by the despicable grandchildren of the

Hulk and She-Hulk (yep, *Old Man Logan* has Hulk-based incest). But that's not all, for Logan is broken down physically as well as emotionally. You see, his body is no longer healing in the same way that it once was, and his abilities and powers seem to be fading. Whilst he can still recover from wounds and beatings, his body now leaves him with painful scars and reminders, meaning that it's been years since he's even drawn his claws. Turning to alcohol to numb the pain, matters are made even worse by the fact that Wolvie has a family to support but no real form of income. That's where an Avenger comes to the rescue. In a world with few heroes left remaining, the now-blind Hawkeye knocks on Logan's door with a job for him: help him transport a package cross-country and he'll reward him with some dollar-dollar. To cut a long story short, Logan accepts the offer and embarks on a traumatic trip across the desolate world that was once the United States, and the package is revealed to be the Super Soldier serum made famous by that Steve Rogers fella. Hawkeye is killed by rogue once-S.H.I.E.L.D. agents, our former *Wolverine* beheads the Red Skull but returns home to see that his wife and child have been killed by the Hulk Gang (the name given to the aforementioned results of inbreeding), and then the aim of the day is to kill each incestuous Hulk offspring before turning his attention to one final battle with the deranged Green Goliath himself, Bruce Banner. After being easily defeated and eaten (!) by the Hulk, Logan recovers in the Engine of Mass Destruction's stomach and bursts out, killing the Hulk in the process before stumbling across a young baby Hulk called Bruce Banner Jr. (imaginative name, right?) and riding off into the sunset to set up a new group of heroes with this infant. Phew! Up to speed? Righto.

From Page to Screen

Now that you're all up to date on how *Old Man Logan* goes, how exactly is this going to play out in James Mangold's *Logan*? Well, certain things are off limits, for a start. For example, 20th Century Fox doesn't have the cinematic rights to either the Hulk or Hawkeye, which throws up some pretty big problems for a straight-up comic-to-screen adaptation. What Mangold and his crew – writers Michael Green and Scott Frank – have done, though, is use the setting of *Old Man Logan* but tweak the details of the tale to fit the cinematic X-Men world that began life with Bryan Singer's game-changing *X-Men* back in 2000. So, we'll still have a beaten-down, pained Logan who is struggling to find meaning in a post-apocalyptic world gone to the dogs, and we'll still also see a world where the X-Men are no more.



On top of that, we'll see the return of Sir Patrick Stewart's Charles Xavier, although poor Professor X is now battling Alzheimer's, meaning he's in the process of forgetting all that he once knew. Joining Logan in looking after Charles will be Stephen Merchant as Caliban (a character played by Tomás Lemarquis in *X-Men: Apocalypse*), but a new mission is on the horizon for *Wolverine*: to save a poor young girl who is being



tortured in ways similar to what he himself went through as part of the Weapon X program. Despite his initial refusal to help out, Logan is being urged by Xavier to carry out one last act of courage and valour and basically to do the right thing because it's simply the right thing to do. In this shit-tip of a world, young mutants are being bred by the nefarious Transigen group purely to become killing machines. When one of their creations, Laura (Dafne Keen), escapes, the race is on to capture this girl and turn her into the vicious savage that they had intended. As Boyd Holbrook's Donald Pierce and the villainous Reavers team are tasked with hunting down Laura and bringing her back 'home', it's down to Logan to have one last stand, one last battle, one last scene of carnage, and one last day of being the hero that he thought was now long left behind in his past.



There is Another...

No, not another film – not yet, at least – but there is indeed more to young Laura than meets the eye. She's not simply another mutant, albeit one experimented on by no-good scientists, but she is seemingly based on a comic book character who would come to be known as Laura Kinney. Who is Laura Kinney, you ask? Well, she's someone also known as X-23. And if X-23 sounds like something you'd find in a Haynes Manual, in the Marvel comics realm X-23 is actually a young female clone of, you guessed it, Wolverine.

Now, don't get us wrong, there's been nothing official from James Mangold, Hugh Jackman, 20th Century Fox or anyone involved in the film to confirm that Dafne Keen's Laura is Laura Kinney/X-23, but it's pretty much a given that she will be, as insinuated in the recent Logan trailers if you read between the lines. Comic book-wise, Dr. Martin Sutter works with Dr. Sarah Kinney and Dr. Zander Rice to recreate the Weapon X experiment that saw Wolverine given an Adamantium skeleton. After some science-y stuff involving X and Y chromosomes, Sarah Kinney ends up having to act as a surrogate mother to what becomes known as X-23. For poor X-23, a life of terror and torment lay ahead, with Zander Rice subjecting her to radiation poisoning before pulling out her claws and coating them in Adamantium without the assistance of even a paracetamol, let alone any anaesthetic. Rice would also activate what's known as X-23's 'trigger scent': basically, something akin to Wolverine's Berserker Rage that saw him tailspin into a flurry of violence and bloodshed, often unaware of who or what he was slicing through. Utilising X-23 as his own personal tool of vengeance, Rice had this young clone partake in several assassinations for him, but his own creation would come back to haunt him when X-23 destroyed several other potential clones (X-24 through to X-50) and ultimately killed Dr. Rice. Sadly, though, during this attack on Rice, in

which X-23's trigger scent was activated, she accidentally killed her mother, Sarah Kinney. With her dying breath, Sarah told X-23 that her name is Laura, and she soon started to call herself Laura Kinney.

Much like many troubled souls, X-23 would soon wind up at the door of Charles Xavier and his School for Gifted Youngsters. Taking residence at the X-Mansion, she'd eventually become a card-carrying member of the offshoot X-Force line-up. Whilst she has a healing factor, heightened senses and reflexes, superhuman strength, and retractable claws like Wolverine, X-23 is also a little different to Logan in the way that she actually has two claws in each hand and one claw in each foot. Despite being created to be an apex killing machine, she'd follow in Wolverine's furry footsteps and become a hero of her own, and even took on the Wolverine mantle for herself following 2014's *Death of Wolverine* and 2015's *Secret Wars* arcs.



Sinister Sorts

Is he in? Is he out? Where Mister Sinister is concerned, we'll all have to wait and see once Logan hits the big screen. The longstanding fan favourite villain of X-Men comic book lore is somebody who many have hoped to see get the cinematic treatment for a long time, and the post-credits sting from Bryan Singer's *X-Men: Apocalypse* only heightened expectation that this rogue will be appearing down the line in a future X-outing.

In case we've got ahead of ourselves, Mister Sinister is a genius scientist who is obsessed with cloning and evolution. Oh, and he looks badass. Like, totally, totally super badass. He's also known by his real name of Nathaniel Essex. In that aforementioned *Apocalypse* scene, we see a sample of Wolverine's blood, obviously labelled Weapon X, placed in

a briefcase marked Essex Corp – which, in turn, caused many comic book fans to lose their mind at what they thought was a certain sign that Sinister and his cloning schemes were on the way. Given how Logan will feature young Wolverine clone X-23, having Mister Sinister and his Essex Corp. be behind that would be a perfect way to introduce this most twisted of villains. Even further, when Richard E. Grant's then-unknown role was said to be a crazy scientist involved in cloning, logic suggested the Withnail and I actor would be taking on the Sinister gig. Despite all of that speculation – plus Bryan Singer's *X-Men: Apocalypse* commentary track confirming Mister Sinister's presence in the next X-movie – the reveal of Grant's role as being Dr. Zander Rice, whilst making perfect sense in the context of X-23 and her story, shot down the chance of him being Mister Sinister barring any surprise twists. Following that reveal, all has gone a little quiet on Sinister actually appearing. Still, even if he doesn't appear, that doesn't mean that he won't have a presence, and it could well be that he'll be the one pulling the strings behind the Transigen group.

One villain we do know will be appearing is Donald Pierce. To be played by Narcos and *Gone Girl*'s Boyd Holbrook, this is a character taken straight from the Marvel comic book realm. In that world, he's a key member of the infamous Hellfire Club team of rogues – seen cinematically in Matthew Vaughn's excellent *X-Men: First Class* – and in Logan he'll be depicted as the leader of the Reavers, a team of cyborg criminals working as the muscle for Zander Rice and Transigen in the hunt for 'Laura'. Interestingly, it's being said that this version of Pierce will actually be somewhat in awe of Wolverine and the legendary acts that he's been known to have committed over the prior decades.





The Final Cut

Seeing as Logan is the ninth and final outing for Hugh Jackman as Wolverine, there's a good chance that there's a lot more to come than has been let out of the bag ahead of the film's release. Most interestingly, there are certain quarters that believe there will be something special when it comes to the real villain of the film. Sure, we know about Dr. Zander Rice, we know about Donald Pierce, and we know about the Reavers, but with a film like this there's surely something being kept back when it comes to the battles that lie ahead in Logan's last stand. Obviously, there's the chatter of Mister Sinister stepping out of the shadows to do battle with Wolverine, but one interesting rumour is that we could very well see Wolvie's longstanding nemesis, Sabretooth, arrive for one more round against his 'brother' – in fact, certain eagle-eyed fans out there claim to have spotted Sabretooth's jacket being worn by Wolverine during a particular scene from the early trailers. Either way, we'll leave the speculation and what ifs for you to mull over in your mind. It could go one of many different ways. Hell, while we're at it, wouldn't it be cool to see Omega Red finally turn up in one of these movies?! Damn straight it would be cool. Again, though, that's another rumour – albeit a more wishful one – that's out there.

Importantly, no matter how Logan's last stand plays out, it looks as if fans may finally get a Wolverine outing that is worthy of such a legendary comic book character. Whilst X-Men Origins: Wolverine was a guilty pleasure at best (meaning we know it's really a bit of a turd) and The Wolverine was a slow-burning stylish affair that was sadly lost on some people, Logan is a tale of soul-searching, redemption, and of a famed gunslinger stepping back into battle for one final showdown. And while other movies in this X-Men movieverse have promised crazy, brutal carnage courtesy of Wolverine, this time it looks as if we're actually

going to get that. In fact, to make sure that Logan could go forward as a completely no-nonsense R-rated movie full of gore and f-bombs, Hugh Jackman took a major pay cut in order to sway the higher-ups at Fox. Granted, the success of Deadpool proved to the studio that an R-rated comic book movie could work, but Jackman had made this commitment before Deadpool had even been released. With the first 40 minutes of the movie having been previewed to special select audiences in the US, the movie has indeed been labelled as violent, adult, epic, Mad Max-esque, like a western and all-round any and all other superlatives you can think of. The same outlets have also talked up that Dafne Keen's Laura is a scene-stealer of Deadpool proportions, high praise considering how jaw-droppingly awesome the Merc with a Mouth was in the much-maligned X-Men Origins: Wolverine.

If – and it really does seem that this will be the case – this is indeed Hugh Jackman's swansong as Wolverine, he deserves a send-off that will go down as one of the greatest comic book-driven movies in history. To date, X2 and X-Men: First Class are the true standouts of the subgenre, although Jackman's furball is kept to an uber-brief cameo in First Class, and The Wolverine really is a masterful example of how to tell a slow, slick and stylish superhero story, but now all of the pieces appear to be in place for Wolverine to get something truly special. Of course, we've been here before and been burned when it comes to films looking good ahead of time, only to fall apart by the time the final product makes it to the silver screen. With Logan, though, maybe – just maybe – everything is aligned to deliver a picture that lives up to, or even surpasses, the hype.

For his work as Wolverine, Jackman deserves his place in genre history. If you remember back, there was outrage upon his initial casting as ol' Canucklehead, largely due to the comic book Wolvie being only 5'3" tall in comparison to

Jackman's 6'2" frame. Despite the doubters, the then-unknown Aussie won everybody over and went on to drive the X-Men franchise forward. Regardless of how good or bad those films were, one thing for certain was that Wolverine always stood out over his peers. That was always going to be the case given how popular the comic book incarnation of the character was, but Jackman took the ball and ran with it, taking the fandom to a whole other level and delivering one of the most impressive depictions of any comic book character to have been brought to life in live-action. Now though, it's over; there's one last round cocked and loaded for this old gunslinger, and you can bet your last buck that Weapon X will go down swinging in what promises to be the Wolverine movie that we've dreamed of for all those years.



To Hugh Jackman, it's been a pleasure to watch him grow into the role, and his dedication and passion for Wolverine is unrivalled. Throw in a final battle drenched in a desolate Johnny Cash soundtrack, and we're sold. But then we were sold from the very first 'snikt!', even if we didn't know it. Give 'em hell, Logan.

LOGAN is in UK cinemas from February 24th, with a US release to follow on March 3rd.

OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL THE NEWS
FROM THE WORLDS
OF DOCTOR WHO
WITH KIERON MOORE



THE RETURN OF DOCTOR MYSTERIO – Ratings

So what did we all think of the latest Christmas special? Our reviewer's verdict can be read on the STARBURST website, but, of course, other opinions are available. 7.83 million other opinions, to be precise, as that's how many people watched *The Return of Doctor Mysterio* (according to BARB's figures, which take into account viewings on Christmas Day itself and the seven following days).

This figure is a step up from last year's *The Husbands of River Song* (superheroes must be more popular than archaeologists) but still low compared to most previous Christmas specials. Don't necessarily take this as a blow for *Who*, though – TV ratings across the board fell from last Christmas, so it's perhaps an achievement that the show managed an increase.

Series Ten Update

As filming continues on this spring's Series Ten, we've been given a sneak peek at what to expect via a brand new trailer, now available online. This confirmed that Pearl Mackie's new companion Bill will begin the series working in a university cafeteria, and the Doctor will be working at the same university as a lecturer. After their paths cross, the two of them (plus Matt Lucas' Nardole) will visit Regency-era England, encounter emoji-faced robots in a technologically advanced city, and encounter Daleks, bishops, and Movellans. Yes, one of those silver-dreadlocked androids from 1979's *Destiny of the Daleks* can be seen in the trailer, being thrown into a wall. Not exactly the most called-for return, but it's certainly got us intrigued.

Moffat Receives RADIO TIMES Award

At this year's BFI & Radio Times Television Festival, current showrunner Steven Moffat will be inducted into the Radio Times Hall of Fame, and will discuss his career on stage with actor and comedian Frank Skinner. Moffat's certainly left a big mark on the show, having been in charge of the past five series and with one more to go, and is also the co-creator of the popular *Sherlock*, so this is likely to be a fascinating discussion. It'll take place on Sunday April 9th at the BFI Southbank in London, and tickets are available from the BFI's website.

Capaldi Undecided on Future

Incumbent Doctor Peter Capaldi has been asked to stay on for Series Eleven, which will be the first series overseen by Chris Chibnall and will air in 2018, but has not yet decided, it has been reported. Capaldi was quoted as saying, "I've been asked to stay on and I haven't made my mind up about that yet, mainly because I don't want to have to make that decision. I'm trying to avoid it! *Doctor Who* does take a lot of time, but it's a wonderful use of it. It's special. I'm lucky enough to be in touch with other Doctors, and we all agree how extraordinary it is to be in this position. To decide to leave is a tough decision for everybody. [It was] very tough for Steven [Moffat], so I'm just putting it off for as long as possible."

Staying on for a fourth series would make Capaldi the longest-serving of the revived series' Doctors, and he's certainly a talented actor whose performance and devotion to the show has won him much admiration. On the other hand, starting his series with a new Doctor would give Chibnall more of a clean slate to make his own mark on the programme, as Moffat and Russell T Davies had before him. Either way, a decision will have to be made sooner or later!





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AT THE WHONIVERSE
BY JR SOUTHALL



Finally, the Year of No *Doctor Who* (and the year in which we lost Bowie and Prince, among others) is over, and here we are in 2017, having just enjoyed (your mileage may vary) the first episode of the series in exactly twelve months (*Class* notwithstanding), and looking forward (possibly) to Series Ten, now just a few weeks away. That's a lot of qualifications for an opening statement, and that's because *Doctor Who* in the 21st century isn't what *Doctor Who* was in the 20th, and for many the adjustment between the two isn't an easy thing. A near-sixteen year gap didn't help, as rather than evolving gradually over the course of that decade and a half, instead *Doctor Who* left our screens as one thing and came back as something else slightly.

One interesting question thrown up by the comparison, though, is the gauge of where we are now as compared with where we were then. In 1972, the programme's tenth series was on the horizon and it began with *The Three Doctors* on the December 30th. The Doctor was in his

third incarnation, was up to his thirteenth companion (again, your mileage may vary) and had been banished to Earth, whereupon the last three seasons had been composed of adventures that were more like *The Avengers* meets *Quatermass*. The original educational aspect of the series had been all but forgotten, and prior to a brief detour in *The Time Monster*, the TARDIS hadn't taken the Doctor on a trip into Earth's history since *The Abominable Snowmen* back in the autumn of 1967. Viewers who had sat through three months of *The Keys of Marinus* and *The Sensorites* ten years previously were about to experience *Carnival of Monsters* and *Frontier in Space*, and for those who could remember how *Doctor Who* had begun, it must now have seemed almost unrecognisable. Barry Letts was the programme's sixth full-time producer and with Terrance Dicks, the series was also on its seventh story editor, meaning the decade it had been in production had been overseen by more than a dozen creative voices each exerting its own pressures on the format.

Little wonder that with only first Russell T Davies and now Steven Moffat at the helm, the modern programme has been much more consistent than its original counterpart. When Series Nine stopped off in 1965 for an episode, it was recognisably still the same programme that had made a detour to 1869 ten years previously.

Hang about, though; perhaps our comparison is flawed, because it had taken the modern incarnation ten years to get to its ninth series, and as we look forward to Series Ten, we are more than three years out of synch with its classic counterpart. It is currently eleven years and ten months since the revival in March 2005; in terms of the original series that would place us in late September of 1975. *Terror of the Zygons* had just been on the television, and *Planet of Evil* was about to begin. We'd had four Doctors (check), the most recent of which was in his second series (check, sort of), and *Doctor Who* was about to become about as popular with casual viewers as it has ever been, Dalekmania and David Tennant

notwithstanding (we'll see).

But that's not really a fair comparison either, as during the 1960s *Doctor Who* had been broadcast with a weekly production schedule that saw a new 25-minute instalment recorded and screened on generally more than forty Saturdays of the year. The modern series has commonly been in production for nine months at a time, but usually that has resulted in around thirteen or fourteen episodes a year, the equivalent of around 28 in old money. So where does that leave us?

At a conservative estimate, we've had approximately 268 25-minute episodes' worth of *Doctor Who* since March 2005. That would leave us somewhere around the middle of the 1970 serial *The Ambassadors of Death*. That's rather less impressive. That's the middle of Jon Pertwee, the Third Doctor's first series on the programme; William Hartnell, the first Doctor, recorded a comparable amount of *Doctor Who* as would take us to roughly the middle of Matt Smith, the third modern Doctor's first series. By that reckoning, the whole of what we've seen in modern *Doctor Who* compares essentially with what the very first Doctor achieved back in the 1960s.

But those were different times, when television was still escaping from the notion of being little more than theatre performed in front of cameras, whereas these days most modern television drama is closer to being a feature film produced on a budget. Is there a way of narrowing the comparison, then, levelling the relationship between what we have now and what we had then?

Perhaps in the number of discrete stories produced. The single biggest factor in bringing a new *Doctor Who* story to screen, given the almost anthology nature of the programme's format, is that each distinct production begins almost entirely again with a new scriptwriter, a new cast, a new series of locations and set designs; a new idea, in other words. The classic series had a few examples of serials that would behave episodically in such a way (mostly from the pen of Terry Nation), but ordinarily the characters and settings that we were



visiting in Part One of a story would still be around in Episode Four or Episode Six.

So how does the number of stories produced now stack up against the number of stories produced back then? *The Return of Doctor Mysterio* was (give or take some ambiguous multi-part stories) the 109th distinct modern *Doctor Who* story. In classic series terms, that's the equivalent of *The Leisure Hive* – or possibly *Shada*, again depending upon your counting. That is, perhaps ominously, the beginning of the Fourth Doctor's final run of stories, and the harbinger of a massive change in the programme's production. Well, Chris Chibnall does seem interested in introducing the concept of the Writers Room into the way the series is made...

But there's something we're forgetting. With the exception of *K9 and Company*, the classic series existed in a something of a bubble, ploughing along in its Saturday evening furrow almost undisturbed for nearly two decades. The modern series, on the other hand, has now had three distinct spin-off series – made as separate productions, admittedly (although perhaps

that's the modern equivalent of all those extra producers and script editors the original had, as compared with the revival's two showrunners), but each a part of the universe in which the parent series exists.

Between them, *Torchwood*, *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, and *Class* have totted up another 154 25-minute episodes' worth of material, 158 including *The Infinite Quest* and *Dreamland*, which when added to the aforementioned 268 takes us to about the end of Season Twelve in terms of the amount of *Doctor Who* that had been broadcast since November 1963. That puts the 2016 Christmas Special opposite *Revenge of the Cybermen* with regard to how much *Doctor Who* we've now had. Again, though, that doesn't take into account the number of times an entirely new script has gone into production, an entirely new set of supporting characters has had to be cast, an entirely new series of sets has had to be struck and a new director engaged.

There have been 173 distinct televised stories in the *Doctor Who* universe in the modern era (including *Class*, which has been made for transmission but hasn't actually been broadcast 'terrestrially' yet, and if you count for example *Utopia* and *Hell Bent* as discrete entities). That doesn't even include the likes of *Time Crash* and *The Night of the Doctor*, which were also 'brand new' productions albeit in miniature.

Survival, the classic series' final broadcast story in 1989, at the end of an unbroken – the events of 1985 apart – 26-year run, was the original series' 155th story (159th taking *Shada* and *The Trial of a Time Lord* into consideration).

That is, without question, a lot of qualifications for a simple comparison. There's no 'like for like' about it; *Doctor Who* in the 21st century isn't what *Doctor Who* was in the 20th. It is, equally without question, a whole lot more than what *Doctor Who* was back in yesteryear – even if, minute for minute, we haven't had quite as much of it.

ARTWORK BY SIMON BRETT





EVOLUTION

As talk turns to our near cousin the ape, we might do well to remember the time an evolutionary theory-doubting Reverend was transformed into one for daring to doubt Darwin! Matthews, the unfortunate clergyman, is a house guest of one Josiah Samuel Smith at Perivale's own Gabriel Chase, Smith having been here rather a long time on a mission cataloguing all life on this planet and in the process casting all vestiges of what he had been aside, simply evolving into a Victorian gentleman. Going rogue and stabbing his leader, Light - who in appearance resembles an angel, much more pleasing to the likes of Matthews, you'd imagine - he keeps the living 'samples' he's collected in the house with him.

Which explains Nimrod, his Neanderthal butler, among other curiosities! Another will soon turn up as the Seventh Doctor brings companion Ace to face her fears, having previously confessed to feeling an evil presence on a past visit... unbeknownst to him and indeed us, the audience, until the novel *Divided Loyalties* enlightened us, he will once again be in the presence of an Eternal, the aforementioned Light. His kind were first encountered by the Doctor two selves earlier, seeking enlightenment in a boat race through the stars.

DOCTOR: Remarkable, though I think they have their maritime history slightly confused.

TURLOUGH: But why waste such skill? What are they trying to achieve?

TEGAN: It's like a game.

TURLOUGH: The crew are real enough.

DOCTOR: Yes. What about the officers?

TURLOUGH: Androids?

DOCTOR: No, no, it's much more complicated than that. Tegan?

TEGAN: I feel terrible. I think I'm seasick.

Smith is in a race of a much more sinister nature, though. Having captured eccentric gentleman explorer Redvers Fenn-Cooper, he intends to use the raving loony's connections to Queen Victoria to stage an assassination and shape the British Empire more to his own liking. All of which is enough to make you incredibly angry if you've spent years making detailed



records of life only to find its all changing - the dilemma Light faces having accidentally been awoken by Ace, who's inevitably horrified when she finds out where she is having struggled with that a little earlier.

ACE: I still haven't worked out where this place is.

MATTHEWS: And I am still waiting for an explanation for your blasphemous theories.

ACE: What theories?

DOCTOR: Darwin's theories. They turned nineteenth century science on its head.

ACE: Is there a free lecture thrown in with dinner?

DOCTOR: Yes, that was always his specialty.

ACE: Do we take notes?

MATTHEWS: Mister Smith disputes man's rightful dominion over the forces of nature.

On the Origin of Species had been published in 1859, rather a long while before the 1883 in which *Ghost Light* is set. Also, it was many years before Tenth Doctor David Tennant voiced old Charles in Aardman's *The Pirates! In an Adventure with Scientists* (a tenuous link). Amidst all this talk of archiving surely there's also space to look at composer Mark Ayres, whose music soundtracks *Ghost Light* as well as *The Greatest Show in the Galaxy* and *The Curse of Fenric* and who later took on the role of safeguarding the Radiophonic Workshop's own library of eclectic sounds following the closure of the great bastion of early electronic tinkering?

Ayres got his start after sending producer John Nathan-Turner a demo of his own incidental music for *Remembrance Of The Daleks* - the original having been tackled by Keff McCulloch, who was the man behind the arrangement of the theme tune itself during Sylvester McCoy's TARDIS tenure.

Liking what he heard, Mark was then taken on. Following the 1998 closure of Room Thirteen at Television Centre, it was



calls from colleagues that spurred him into action. "I suddenly got phone calls from Brian [Hodgson], then Peter Howell, then Paddy [Kingsland]. They all said 'Someone's got to get in there and save the archive before it ends up in a skip!' - so I did."

The BBC ended up paying him to restore the reams of old tapes to former glories for future use, which he did as part of the *Doctor Who* Restoration Team initially and still does to this day as part of official releases, his latest project having been tackling the audio on the tarted up *Power Of The Daleks*. At last count "There are about 250 reels of sound effects, each up to 40 minutes long and containing about 100 sounds. It's an enormous task."

But for him, it's all about "using what

you have to hand and being ambitious with it. Whether it's a lamp shade or a Macintosh computer, as long as you're using that technology and being creative - and not just allowing it to use you - that's what keeps us amused." The mention of the lampshade is telling - Delia Derbyshire once used a now-famous green one as part of her sonic armoury.

Taking things full circle in a sense, Mark would be behind a remaster of her original theme completed in time for press screenings of *Rose*, Episode One of Series One, put together as Murray Gold worked on finishing off his own orchestral score. Which featured samples sent in by Mark.

"One day, the parts turned up on a CD; Mark must have sent it over." Those pieces were then merged with the orchestral elements to create the finished theme first heard heralding the broadcast cut of *Rose*. Only three full scores, but a second wind allowed Ayres to play a much more important role sonically, we might conclude.

Certainly a long way from being "locked in Maida Vale... basically putting labels on boxes."

Though in a sense, he's now putting labels on sound files, having admitted the process of moving things forward into the digital age is rather difficult.

"I've started a digitisation programme but it needs a lot of investment to do it properly. It's nearly 4,000 analogue tapes and they won't last for ever. The national sound archive reckon we have about ten years to save all this material - either it will have disintegrated beyond saving, or the equipment to reliably play it will no longer exist."

Ear-volution starts here, we can but hope, with the long-anticipated coming of the New Radiophonic Workshop...



CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

REVIEWS

THE LATEST
DOCTOR WHO
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



DOCTOR WHO IN AN EXCITING ADVENTURE WITH THE DALEKS, DOCTOR WHO AND THE CRUSADERS, DOCTOR WHO AND THE ZARBI

HARDBACK / AUTHOR: DAVID WHITAKER, BILL STRUTTON / PUBLISHER: BBC BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW (SEPARATELY)

BBC Books has republished the three novels which began the Doctor Who literary phenomenon back in the mid-sixties in their original hardback format with beautiful facsimiles of the original dust-jacket covers. They are, almost without exception, things of joy and delight. However, Doctor Who in an Exciting Adventure with the Daleks (it's the full title, honestly!) is not only the best of the three but also surely the very best work of Doctor Who fiction ever published; a brilliantly atmospheric work of fierce intelligence and imagination even now, some fifty years after the event.

David Whitaker, Doctor Who's original story editor, in retelling the story of the Doctor's first exciting encounter with the dreaded Daleks, has deftly rewritten the show's history in a manner that would cause today's continuity-obsessed purists to strangle themselves with their own multicoloured scarfs and choke on their jelly babies. Whitaker refashions the famous 1963 origin episode An Unearthly Child by recasting Ian Chesterton (on TV a teacher at Coal Hill School along with Barbara Wright) as an ex-teacher who – almost literally – bumps into Barbara on foggy Barnes Common on his way back from a failed job interview. Teacher Barbara has been involved in a road accident with a lorry and her passenger, a mysterious pupil named Susan, has disappeared into the night. The pair encounters a strange, wily white-haired old man and eventually stumbles upon a mysterious Police Box inexplicably sited in

the middle of nowhere. So begins the story of what would become a TV legend, but not quite how its young audience might have remembered it from two years before the book's publication.

Whitaker ditches the stagey, talky caveman serial that was the show's first televised adventure and instead pitches his travellers in space and time straight to a blasted, irradiated planet where the survivors of a terrible atomic war are locked in a ferocious struggle for survival. In their gleaming metal city, the Daleks, hideously mutated and encased inside sleek, lethal travelling machines, plot to wipe out the peace-loving Aryan Thals who are struggling to stay alive in the planet's petrified forests and want nothing more than to become allies of the city-dwelling Daleks. But as we know all too well, friendship isn't high on the agenda of the Daleks...

Whitaker's book is a magnificent, mature piece of storytelling, firmly rooted in an archetypal smoggy, mundane monochrome post-war British landscape before launching its incredulous (and incredible) characters into a thrilling adventure on a far distant planet populated by extravagant and extraordinary creatures. Whitaker never writes down to his young audience (or maybe young readers back in the 1960s were a little more literate?) and his core cast – the Doctor, Ian, Barbara, and Susan – are beautifully, intricately characterised, the story told from Ian's

point of view as he battles to adapt to the impossible on a hostile world inhabited by monsters and creatures way beyond his experience and imagination. Anyone minded to dip their toes into the world of Doctor Who fiction needs to start their journey here with an enthralling story of an adventure in space and time, if only to remind themselves that there really was a period when Doctor Who wasn't just a succession of colourful, lightweight, gag-a-minute hi-jinks.

Whitaker also adapted his own second season historical adventure The Crusade as Doctor Who and the Crusaders, another mature and thought-provoking narrative in which the Doctor, Ian, and Barbara – now accompanied by space orphan Vicki following the departure of Susan in the wake of a rematch battle with the Daleks – turn up in 12th-century Palestine at the time of the Third Crusade. Barbara is captured by the Saracens and Ian sets out to rescue her as the Doctor and Vicki become involved in intrigues at the court of Richard I. Fast-paced and florid, The Crusaders is a gripping time-travel story which never shies away from depicting the realities of life in a blood-drenched period in human history and, in its first chapter, delivers a well-considered rumination by the Doctor on the morality of time travel – without a hint of either wibbly-wobbly or timey-wimey. The reprint collection is rounded off by Bill Strutton's brusque, no-nonsense adaptation of his bizarre 1965 serial The Web Planet, an early serial which demonstrated the show's fearlessness in telling stories it was utterly financially unequipped to bring to the screen. On the planet Vortis, the Doctor and his friends meet intelligent man-sized ants, flying butterfly-men, deadly venom grubs and a pulsating intelligence that has spread its web of terror across an arid, desolate planet. The least literary of the three original books, The Zarbi is a straightforward fantasy romp and easily the best way to enjoy a story whose TV episodes are pretty much unwatchable for a modern audience.

Original prints of these novels are now rarer than venom grub's eggs and whilst the BBC Books Logo on the spine belies the provenance of these editions as reprints, they're still beautiful books in their own right, a gorgeous exercise in nostalgia and a handsome addition to any Doctor Who fan's groaning bookshelf.

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★★★ 9



by Paul Mount

CHRIS CROW

Cardiff-born director Chris Crow has been quietly building an impressive CV in genre filmmaking since the release of his brutal survivalist thriller **DEVIL'S BRIDGE** in 2010. His follow-ups **PANIC BUTTON** and **A VIKING SAGA: THE DARKEST DAY** were both well received and his latest dark thriller **THE LIGHTHOUSE**, based on the true story of the Smalls Island tragedy in 1801, has been attracting rave reviews and was a highlight of the recent **STARBURST** International Film Festival. Chris, who still lives in Cardiff and works with his production partner David Lloyd under the Dogs of Annwn banner, recently spoke to us about his life, his career and how he brought the bleak tale to life...

STARBURST: What inspired you to become a filmmaker?

Chris Crow: I remember my Mum taking me when I was tiny to see *The Empire Strikes Back* and I came out and my life was changed. I was obsessed with 'doing that' even though I didn't know what 'that' was! Having seen *Star Wars* when I was really young, I think it was the darkness of *Empire* that hit me like a bat! That was my first realisation of how powerful film can be. I come from a working class family so the route to college was very difficult. I met David when we were about 17 in art college and we had a mutual obsession with *Blade Runner* and comics. We always talked about making films. I did apply to do a film degree but I had no way of making films; I couldn't afford to use 'film' and had no access to a video camera but the year after we left they introduced a film module on our foundation, which I missed. So I ended up doing a fine art degree because they told me I could do film but when I got there they told me they didn't actually offer film - they just wanted the numbers, you know - so I ended up in the sculpture dungeon and started making props and sets for theatre and a little bit of TV. When I left college, I became a photographic illustrator. I did a load of magazine and book covers for all the major British magazines and publishers.

So how did you eventually find yourselves making films?

I got an illustration agent in London when I was quite young and started attracting a lot of commissions in that field, I was trying to save up to make a feature film and eventually the technology became more readily available. I started making short films with no money, just learning as much as I could, how to edit, how to grade, how to do titles, sound mixing - I



THE LIGHTHOUSE



just taught myself really through trial and error (a lot of error). Eventually, talking to David, we realised we could apply all this to feature films. At the time, David had a couple of online businesses that were doing quite well so we shot *Devil's Bridge* for about £35,000 with David and Vern Raye investing/producing.

***Devil's Bridge* went down well - we certainly loved it - but what did you learn from the experience of making your first feature?**

I learned everything. It's so hard to make a film with next to nothing because there are always things you'd love to have done and time is your biggest enemy so you have to compromise when you don't have enough money. On *Devil's Bridge*, we had four days planned for the final chase and we had extreme high contrast sun for two of the days and apocalyptic rain for two days, so we had to ditch a good ten minutes of a nice action finale because we just could not grade it up to match. You look at most Hollywood films and they just reshoot problem scenes and spend double the budget just reshooting! Another three days on *Devil's Bridge* would have done so much for that particular scene. We shot it over two-

and-a-half weeks; it's a rough diamond really. My next film, *Panic Button*, was done in four weeks, *The Lighthouse* was four weeks; we really needed six weeks but we just couldn't afford it. Even with a slightly bigger budget, *The Lighthouse* would have been a much better film but we had to cut a couple of key scenes just to bring it in on time.

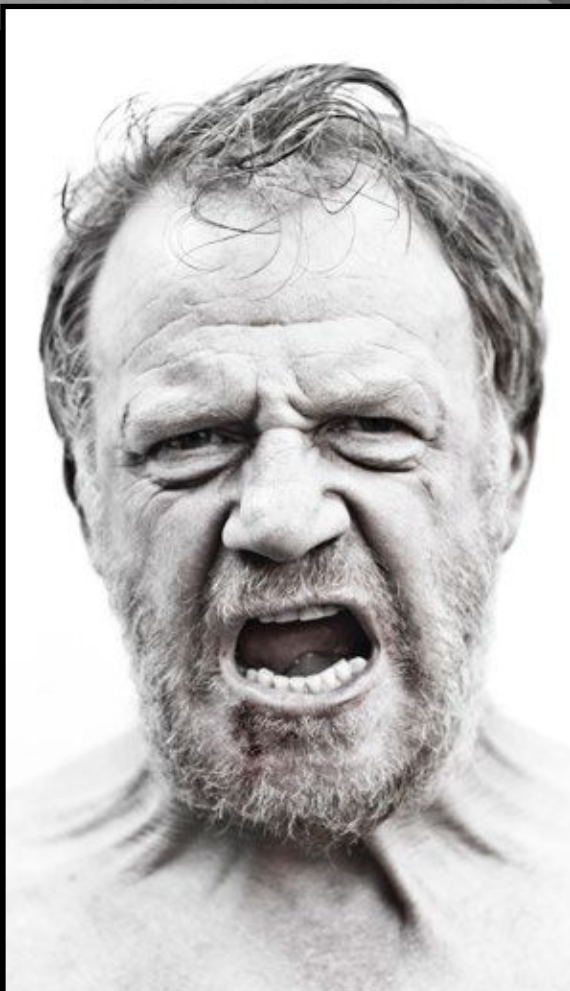
Moving on to *The Lighthouse* then, how did the project come about?

Vern Raye, one of the producers on *Devil's Bridge*, told me about the story of Smalls Island originally. The true story is horrific. These two guys, Howell and Griffith, who absolutely hated each other got sent out to the lighthouse, one of the worst storms in recorded history came in, trapped them in the lighthouse and one of them died. Because it was widely known that they hated each other, the other one made the coffin - he was a cooper originally - so they couldn't accuse him of killing his colleague, but the storm smashed it and the body got caught in the ropes - the knocking of the body's hand against the lighthouse was all true. When they picked him up, he'd gone utterly insane. Not even his own

family recognised him when they got him back; his hair had gone white and he was a gibbering mad man. It's pure Edgar Allan Poe. That's what's known about it. He might have murdered him, he might have died in his sleep - the truth is lost to history.

How important was it to you to remain respectful of the fact that you were telling a 'true story' about real people in a terrible situation?

It was very important to remain respectful to these guys, but being a film, we needed to create these characters, their backstories, motivations, and desires. It was common knowledge that they detested each other in real life so I began to work out why - obviously this was fiction as no-one knows why they didn't get along. The job they did would have been both hellish and extremely difficult - and those times were hard. I wanted to introduce an almost poisoned machismo to them and I wanted them both to be broken by life and by their job, almost a level of post-traumatic stress syndrome. The film needed to be really character-driven but I wanted to respect what the actual Howell and Griffith did - keeping the light.



How much preproduction time did you have before you started filming and how tough did you find the actual filming process?

There were a number of backers involved from day one, so the development process took some time. On a low budget we really had to spend a lot of time planning the logistics, working out what could be CGI and what could be practical (locations, set build, etc.). The post-production was lengthy, too, particularly as there were over 400 CGI shots to complete. It was always part of our thinking that the only way we could do this was to find a warehouse where we could build the sets and we lucked out in finding one in Cardiff that we could use for three months, which gave us time to build everything. The guys who did it really excelled themselves and we had to throw the money there. But it was really intense. We actually put rain machines in the warehouse because the beacon was getting lashed by rain. It was cold because it was winter and there was no heating and it was a quite gruelling experience for everyone being wet, dangling off ropes and cranes. It was pretty grim but the really nice thing of it

being a two-hander in that space is that it feels believable and claustrophobic.

How open are you to the idea of your actors becoming involved in the creative side of the production?

You've got to be 100% open to actors contributing. I've always felt really honoured that actors say I'm an actor's director. I come from a visual background so the look is extremely important, but I pride myself on my ability to work with actors. It's always nice to read how naturalistic performances are and that's always down to collaboration because you've got to trust your actors to bring their skills to it. Something might look great on a page and an actor might say "I can do it like this" or "Do we need all this?" The way I work we do a lot of onset rehearsal just before we shoot - I generally only storyboard key scenes because I'd rather work with the actors in how the scene works and what coverage it needs. My preference is always for strong character actors, somebody who will inhabit a character; that's really more rewarding for a director. I'd rather cast someone who is

human and helpful, it makes your life a lot easier on set.

The Lighthouse isn't in any way a traditional 'horror' film. How would you describe it?

It's not a horror film at all. We sold it as a psychological thriller. It would have been really easy to turn it into a film about a haunting but I think that, if we'd had six weeks, we could have added a more *Jacob's Ladder* nuance; is he insane, are they both dead, are they in Hell or Limbo? I don't think I've ever made a horror film. All my films have been thrillers, really. They're dark but they're very much about damaged humanity.

What would you like the audience to get out of *The Lighthouse*?

What we always talked about and what we wanted to instill in an audience was the sense of 'what would I do, stuck on a wooden lighthouse in a storm with a guy I don't like? How would I survive all that death and madness around me?' I wanted to do it in a more sophisticated manner, a character-driven story but based on a true event. Hopefully, people



will look at it and think 'Christ, we've got it a lot easier these days!' We wanted to make it feel like an ordeal, make the audience feel like they're also trapped there in that relentless storm.

You also have a hand in writing your own scripts. Is that out of choice or necessity?

As a kid, I used to write and draw my own books and comics and I suppose it's been an element of necessity professionally. I'd rather work with writers, to be honest, even if it was us developing something from the start or seeing something interesting in a script which needs development. It is lovely to work with other writers but I'm also quite happy to carry on living in the fantasy world I've lived in since I was a kid when needs be!

Where do you see yourself and Dogs of Annwn going next?

Whatever we do next, we have to be realistic and it has to be commercial, aiming at the Cineworld market. Whichever way we finance the next one, we have to go by a more conventional route, but my understanding is that as long as you have a strong enough script and it ticks the right commercial boxes, you've got a decent head start. For low budget films, our previous movies have all done incredibly well. Each film we do, we learn more and more. We've got a really interesting slate coming together. I'm very keen to tackle a high-concept sci-fi soon as that was really the genre that got me hooked on this whole 'make believe' world we live in.

What advice would you give to aspiring filmmakers?

Don't do it! No, seriously, I'd say 'never give up'. With each film comes a new crushing rejection or experience but you just have to keep going, you have to believe in yourself, your team and your project!

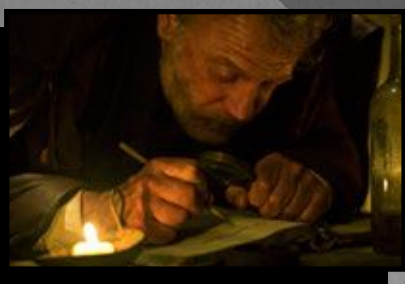
What's your view of crowd-funding as a way of getting a project off the ground?

I'm not sure to be honest in regard to feature films; pros and cons. I think the problem of using them for bigger projects that may never get made is that you could leave a lot of your supporters very disappointed. Nevertheless, I think they offer fantastic opportunities and exposure if you can get the campaign and rewards right. I think they're perfect for short films, a little more difficult for features.

Find out more about Dogs of Annwn at dogsofannwn.com. THE LIGHTHOUSE is available on DVD and download now.

All images by Sebastian Solberg.





THE LIGHTHOUSE

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: CHRIS CROW / SCREENPLAY: CHRIS CROW, PAUL BRYANT, MICHAEL JIBSON / STARRING: MARK LEWIS JONES, MICHAEL JIBSON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Inspired by a real-life tragedy which occurred in 1801 at the Smalls Island lighthouse miles off the coast of West Wales, *The Lighthouse* is the latest feature from director Chris Crow, who impressed with sturdy calling card movies *Panic Button* (edgy social media thriller) and *Devil's Bridge* (brutal survivalist horror). *The Lighthouse*, however, whilst it shares the potentially claustrophobic predominantly single setting format of *Panic Button*, is an entirely different proposition to any of Crow's other movies. This is a much more intimate, stifling and uncomfortable experience, a true psychological horror story made all the more chilling and effective because of its roots in a half-forgotten folk tale (albeit one that resulted in fundamental changes to the way lighthouses operated thereafter - until full automation in 1980, lighthouses were always manned by three keepers).

It's the beginning of the 19th century and life doesn't look too rosy for Thomas Howell (Jibson) and Thomas Griffiths (Jones) when they are posted to 'keep the light' at a wooden-framed lighthouse on a tiny island off the Welsh coast. On arrival they're told "she don't want us here... and neither do these bastard rocks." The pair, both grizzled and battered by time and, as we discover, personal tragedy, settle into their mundane existence at the lighthouse. Their fortunes take a turn for the worse when a ferocious - almost supernatural - storm whips up, throwing the cold and wild waters of the Irish Sea at the beleaguered lighthouse. The storm goes on and on but their rations are running low and there's no hope of rescue as the storm rages furiously.

What follows is a dark and disquieting journey into the heart of madness and despair as the pair's circumstances become even bleaker and more terrible. Both men bear the scars of lives touched by death and perhaps they've come to the island as a penance and as a way to escape the crushing unending darkness of their lives. Crow's movie is an exploration of what drives a man to the edge - and beyond; as events unfold, we're plunged into a nightmare world where reality and unreality are never far apart and where, sometimes, the horrifying is much more terrifying than the horrific.

The Lighthouse is a bold, demanding film and by its very nature, it's not likely to find favour with everyone. It's mercilessly grim, its lead characters are taciturn and troubled and there's no light and shade here in a story that appears to offer little more than two stern men glaring and shouting angrily at each other across a very small room. Beautifully played by the always-reliable Mark Lewis Jones and Crow regular Jibson (who also had a hand in the script), *The Lighthouse* is never less than a tense, immersive experience, deftly and cleanly realised by Crow, with effects so subtle they barely register as effects at all. In an entirely different league to so much of today's cheap, derivative horror fodder (and there's a case to be made that it isn't really a horror film at all), *The Lighthouse* is a welcome beacon of quality in a genre often happy to rely on cheap tricks and easy scares and offers so much more, amply rewarding those who are willing to embrace its blunt and brittle world.





SUBSPACE RELAY

ALL THE NEWS
FROM THE
WORLDS OF
STAR TREK
WITH IAIN
ROBERTSON



THE WALKING DEAD'S Sonequa Martin-Green Set to Star in DISCOVERY

It's been a long time coming, but **Star Trek Discovery** seems to have finally found its lead actor, in the form of **The Walking Dead's** Sonequa Martin-Green.

Discovery will be the biggest role yet for the 31-year-old. She's appeared on **The Walking Dead** as Sasha since the show's third season, as well as having a recurring role on **Once Upon A Time** and guest slots on the likes of **New Girl** and **Gossip Girl**. Martin-Green will be the first African American woman to appear as a series regular on **Trek** since Nichelle Nichols, and only the second female to play the lead, following in the footsteps of the mighty Kate Mulgrew.

As announced a few months back by then-showrunner Bryan Fuller, in a **Trek** first the lead character won't actually be the ship's captain. Instead, Sonequa will play an officer aboard the **Discovery**, reportedly named Lieutenant Commander Rainsford.

Unusually, her casting or character name has yet (at time of writing) to be confirmed either by CBS or by the actor herself, although both have been widely reported elsewhere. CBS has exclusively revealed every other casting announcement to date.

Besides **Discovery**, Martin-Green is apparently to continue appearing on **The Walking Dead**. Considering that show's high body count and their reluctance to announce when cast members are being killed off, don't be surprised if Sasha comes to a rather messy end if filming commitments on **Trek** get a little demanding.

If Martin-Green is indeed the lead, she'll join fellow **Discovery** shipmates Doug Jones and Anthony Rapp, who were announced a while ago. Also starring on the show is Michelle Yeoh as the captain of another starship, and a trio of Klingons, whom you can read about on this very page. Expect the remaining casting announcements before the cameras finally roll on **Discovery** towards the end of January.

Are Pegg and Jung Writing the Next Movie?

If you cast your mind back a few months to just before the release of **Star Trek Beyond**, Paramount enthusiastically announced that a fourth Kelvin Universe film was being planned, featuring the return of Chris Hemsworth as George Kirk. They also announced that it would be written by J. D. Payne and Patrick McKay who, alongside Roberto Ori, wrote the original, rejected script for the most recent movie.

Beyond then under-performed at the box office, with its \$343 million worldwide gross the lowest of the three movies (honestly,

people have no taste) and things went a bit quiet on talk of another sequel.

It is apparently still happening, though, and it looks like the **Beyond** writing team of Simon Pegg and Doug Jung (aka Mr Sulu) may have taken over writing duties. A few weeks ago, Pegg's official Twitter account (@simonpegg) posted a picture of the pair sat in front of their MacBooks at Bad Robot, who produce the current movie series. There's been no confirmation from anyone what they were working on, but **Trek** would seem to be the obvious choice. **Beyond** was the most **Star Trek**-y of the recent films, and therefore as far as some are concerned the best of the bunch, so this is potentially very good news. Alternatively, they could have just been playing **Candy Crush**. Watch this space.

Klingons Head to DISCOVERY

Whilst we're still awaiting announcements on who'll play the remainder of **Discovery's** crew, CBS has confirmed a trio of actors who will be appearing as Klingons in the show.

Chris Obi will play T'Kuvma: 'a Klingon leader seeking to unite the Klingon houses'. Besides upcoming appearances in **American Gods** (from **Discovery** co-creator Bryan Fuller) and **Ghost In The Shell**, he was in the recent remake of **Roots** (the original of which starred **Next Generation's** LeVar Burton) and had a small role in **Doctor Who's** Closing Time.

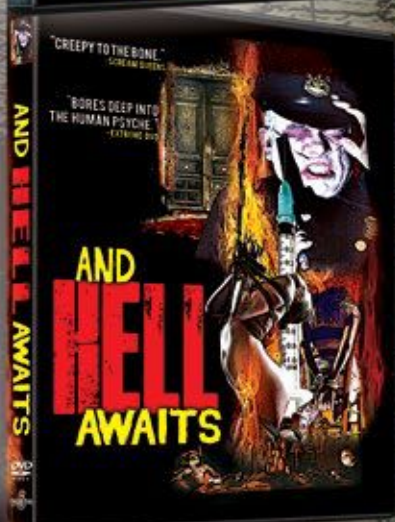
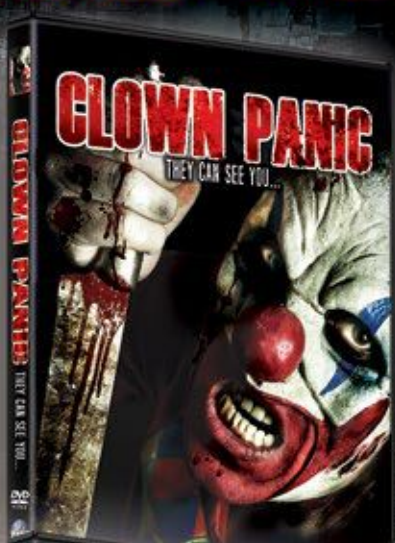
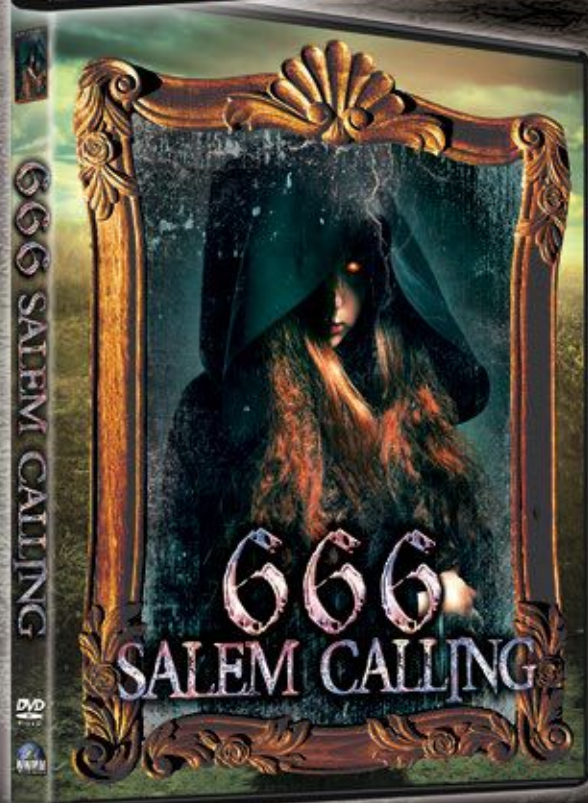
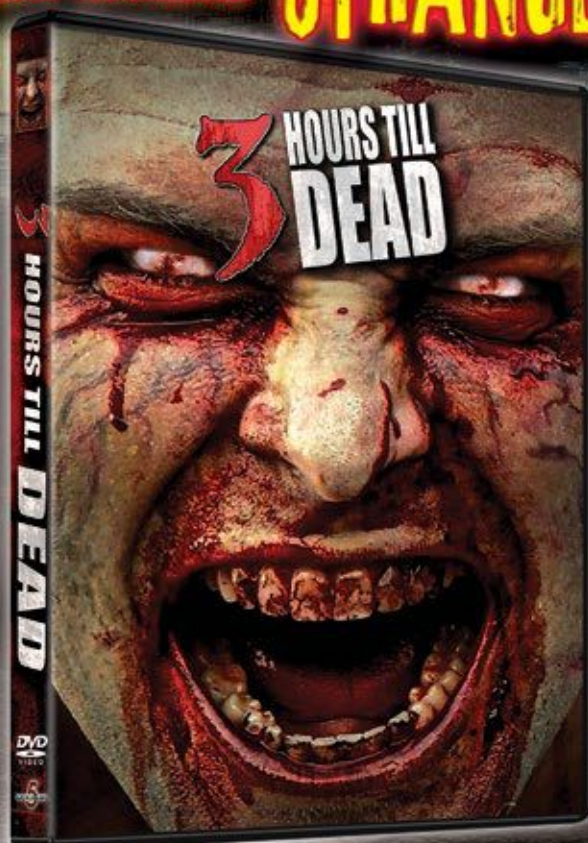
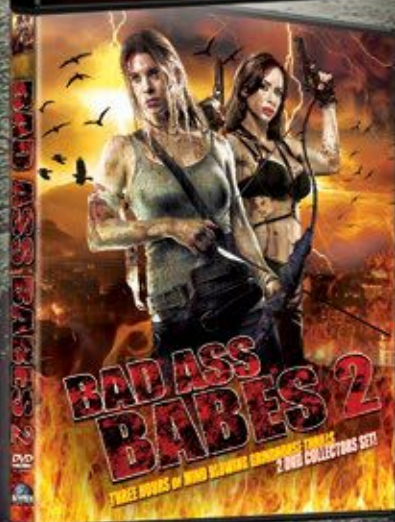
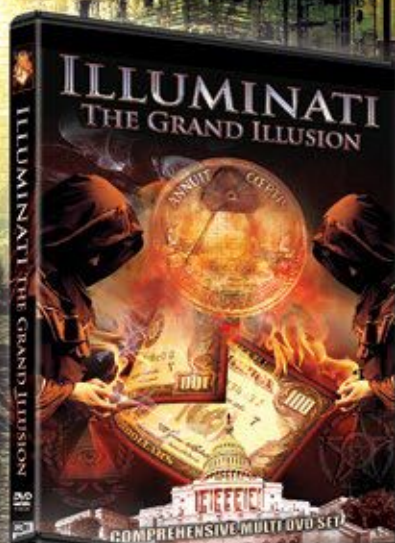
Probably the best known of the three actors – at least in the UK, Shazad Latif plays Kol, commanding officer of the Klingons and protégé of T'Kuvma. He was most recently seen as Doctor Jekyll in the final series of **Penny Dreadful**. He also plays Clem Fandango in **Toast of London**, and was a regular on **Spooks** for a couple of series as well as appearing in that episode of **Black Mirror** where the Prime Minister shagged a pig (which was complete fantasy. Honest).

Finally, Mary Chieffo will play L'Rell, the 'battle deck commander of the Klingon ship'. A Julliard graduate, she's an accomplished Shakespearean actor, having starred in a number of productions. She's also appeared in a number of small, independent movies.

Confirmation that Klingons will play a prominent role in **Discovery** is good news for fans. As the show is set prior to the Original Series, the Klingon Empire and Federation are yet to become allies, meaning there's plenty of potential for conflict. It will also be interesting to see how the Klingons will look. Will they have the ridged foreheads seen in modern series, the human-looking version that appeared in the Original Series or a complete redesign? Those fans who stuck it out to the end of **Enterprise** (and if you didn't, why the hell not? The last season was great) will know that at this point in **Trek** history, the Klingons had lost their forehead ridges due to a virus – a side effect of an attempt at genetic engineering, and it'll be interesting to see how **Discovery** deals with this.



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5



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THE TREKOLOGIST

From the
desk of the
STARBURST
Trekologist
B. JONES



That's right, he didn't go! It does make you wonder that it is even possible as the only other non-commissioned character ever seen was Yeoman Rand in the original series and she didn't even last two seasons.

O'Brien was obviously a clever chap; he managed to survive 232 battle engagements on several different starships and no doubt help keep them glued together during the battles. It looks like this guy is the one to have aboard in a fight if you want to see tomorrow! Mind you, he did end up with a massive Cardassian-shaped chip on his shoulder [ST:TNG *The Wounded*].

It really makes you wonder how the **Original Series**, **Voyager** and **Enterprise** got away with not having such a character. How are we supposed to understand anything without the O'Brien filter on maximum?

To help us understand what it was like to be taken over by an alien inmate, they used O'Brien [ST:TNG *Power Play*]; to help us understand what life was like in the mirror universe, they used O'Brien [DS9 *Crossover*]; to see what having a surrogate mother was like, they used O'Brien's family [DS9 *Crossover*]. They even had him in *Trials and Tribble-ations* to give the ordinary man's view on Kirk's universe. He was put in a red shirt and breezed through that encounter. Being ordinary seems to make you immortal.

Of course, having appeared in 180 hours of exciting and interesting stories on television doesn't mean you get to appear in any of the movies. That is clearly for dynamic officer types only (and Yeoman Rand, who pops up all over the original series movies. Well played Rand, well played).

Miles O'Brien - An ordinary life in an extraordinary world...

Star Trek brings us a universe full of mythic tales, moral dilemmas and epic battles full of dynamic, talented people for whom working on a starship or a starbase is the only thing they ever wanted to do. It is their destiny, their one true calling.

Which for the most part is great; but how do we, the humble viewer, connect with all these mighty folk? How can we, in our earth-bound commuter-centric lives, understand what it's like to live in the Roddenberry Universe? By engaging the O'Brien common-man viewer, of course. What better way to take 20th century man to the future than to use a well-disguised 20th century man?

Miles Edward O'Brien is the ordinary little fellow who joins in with all the heroes and then goes home to his wife and 2.4 children at the end of his day for his tea. Unless, of course, he has had a row with the missus and he goes out for a drink with his best mate Julian. This means that we get to enjoy a vibrant, fully rounded character who has a history, a day job and yes, unbelievably, a whole something else to do when he is not fixing things out in space.

Over the course of his fourteen years of service (starting in the pilot of **Star Trek: The Next Generation** and ending with the finale of **Deep Space Nine**), we have seen him get

promoted from Transporter Chief to Chief of Operations on a Cardassian-built starbase and finally to teach at the Academy on Earth. Not bad for a boy who was going to the Aldebaran Music Academy to play cello professionally for the rest of his life. That is, if his father has anything to do with it.

Instead, he enlisted straight into Starfleet and didn't go to the Academy.



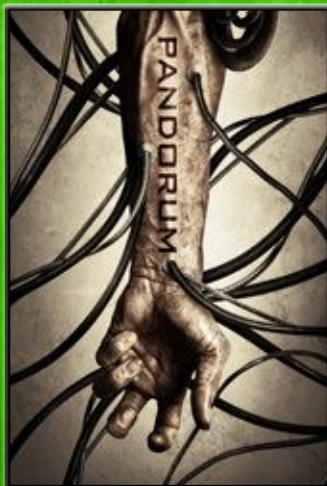
HORROR Obscura

This month, the metagalactic Martin Unsworth gets his scientific head on and explores some Sci-Fear...

NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU SCREAM



PANDORUM



Horror and sci-fi have always been closely related, as the fear of the unknown naturally extends to outer space and even more so to what science can discover (and, in our darkest thoughts, cover up) in the exploration of knowledge. When we think of this crossover, films such as Ridley Scott's *Alien* come to mind, but there is more to the subgenre than just fleeing extra-terrestrial monsters. A quartet of such films will be screening throughout January on Horror Channel, under the banner 'Sci-Fear' (damn, we wish we had thought of that title), so it's fitting that we should showcase a few of them since they were rather overlooked on initial release.

Taking the lead from the *Alien* scenario, *Pandorum* (2009) is set in the distant future on the spaceship Elysium, which was sent into space on a mission to populate a distant planet that is able to sustain life, Tanis. In a familiar set-up, a pair of crew members awaken from stasis with no signs of what has happened on board, and little or no memory of why they were there. All they have are tattoos on their arms with their rank and team number. Bower (Ben Foster) is first awake, and realising things are a little amiss, brings Lieutenant Payton (Dennis Quaid) out of his hyper-sleep. The ship's engine is about to give up, and they must reset the cycle of the reactor if they are to have any chance of survival. Bower can't remember what their mission or destination was, but does have recollection of his role in the crew: technical engineer. Leaving Payton at the control panel, he attempts to make his way through the ship's ventilation system shaft and miles of corridors.

The two of them are not alone on the ship, however, nor were they the first to awake. Bower comes across the mummified body of one of their crew mates, who appears to have attempted the same route, and has succumbed to a fall that nearly killed Bower early on. He also comes across a few more people on his perilous journey to the heart of the ship; some are hostile but calm down while others have only one motivation - to kill and eat. These mutated creatures are incredibly fast-moving and appear in great numbers. Another threat to the survivors is the fear of coming down with 'pandorum', a sickness that grows like mental illness and causes the victim to lose all sense and reason, ultimately resulting in mass murder.

One of the members of the previous crew Bower comes across (who sadly doesn't last too long) is played by Norman Reedus, best known as fan favourite Daryl from *The Walking Dead*. However, Dennis Quaid - who used to be a stalwart of some of the biggest movies of the '80s and '90s and starred in some fantastic sci-fi fantasy films, such as *Innerspace* (1987), *Dreamscape* (1984), and *Enemy Mine* (1985) - is brilliant here, even if

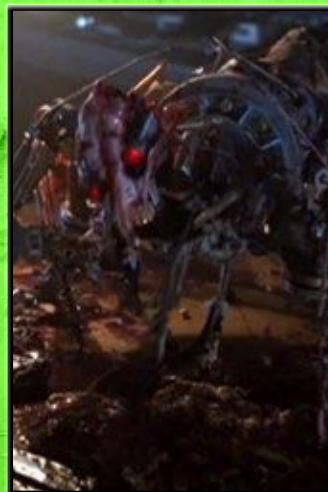
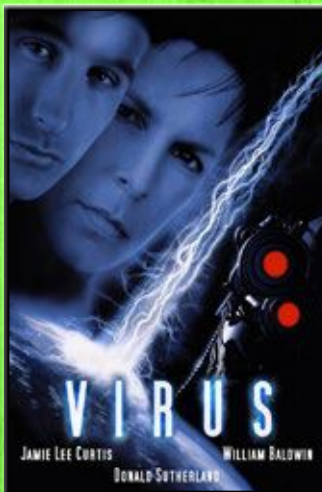
he gets little to do but sit at a console for the first three quarters of the movie. Naturally, we're not going to reveal too many of *Pandorum's* secrets, but let's just say, there are more than a few twists and turns, and the desolate spaceship is stunningly realised. The tension, as well as the growing sense of isolation and desperation that the film conveys, is palpable. It's a lower budget film that slipped through most viewers' gazes, but it's certainly worth checking out.

Keeping the *Alien* vibe is 1999 shocker *Virus*, based on the Dark Horse comic series by Chuck Pfarrer. That said, *Alien* isn't the only film this one riffs on, although it's not annoyingly derivative. Donald Sutherland is Captain Everton, skipper of a small salvage ship that gets caught in a massive tornado at sea. Taking shelter in the eye of the storm, they come across a stricken Russian science ship, seemingly deserted. Being the money-minded man he is, he claims salvage rights on it, and the crew begin to attempt to get the massive vessel ready for towing to land. Everton's navigator Foster (horror royalty Jamie Lee Curtis) is apprehensive at making such a bold venture - as she points out, should any of the original crew be found alive, they won't be able to claim anything. "We better not find any alive, then" Everton sinisterly smirks.

And find one they do. Or she finds them, as Russian science officer Nadia (Joanna Pacula) comes bursting from a storage cupboard all guns blazing. Foster manages to stop Everton killing her, but the panicked woman warns them all that they are going to die. However, it's not a threat; she's talking about something that has taken over the ship. Apparently, an alien life force passed through the MIR space station, bringing it out of orbit and hitting the ship. The alien has taken over the electrics of the vessel, learnt from its computers, created mechanised creatures to do its bidding and, perhaps even more terrifying, found a way to meld man and machine. It now wants to get rid of the humans that it sees as a 'virus' and danger to the planet (to be fair, it has a point).

What follows is a standard haunted house scenario, with those left alive attempting to shut down the ship, therefore robbing the entity of its power. William Baldwin is along as one of the crewmen, but it's Curtis who is the hero here. Even then, she has her share of scares and almost comes a cropper herself once or twice. As well as the Ridley Scott movie, there are numerous influences to both the look and story of *Virus*, be it the robotic spiders from Michael Crichton's *Runaway* (1984) or the biomechanical Borg hybrids of *Star Trek*, with an added dollop of *Hardware* (1990). Despite the pillaging, it's actually a fun movie that certainly deserved to do better when it was released back at the turn of the millennium. The

VIRUS



THE SIGNAL



special effects actually hold up well and it's suitably gory enough to merit its inclusion here.

A little more down to earth, but certainly out of this world, is *The Signal* (2014). It's directed by William Eubank, whose previous film *Love* (2011) was an interesting - if flawed - tale of an astronaut stranded alone on the International Space Station. *The Signal* opens with a trio of friends taking a road trip. Nic (Brenton Thwaites), who's suffering from a debilitating illness, is taking his girlfriend Haley (the fantastic Olivia Cooke, best known for *Bates Motel*) across country as she has decided to relocate for a year. Their friend, Jonah (Beau Knapp) is along for the ride. The two boys are computer boffins and have recently been accused of hacking the MIT system. While they're in the midst of their journey, they get a communication from someone called Nomad who confesses that he framed them and taunts them with his knowledge. They decide they can't let this 'kid in his mother's basement' win, and manage to find his location, so detour the route to the heart of Nevada to confront the hacker.

Finding a shack in the middle of nowhere, they enter to investigate. There's no one there, and it's pitch black, having arrived there in the middle of the night. Lit only by torch, they explore the almost barren dwelling. Jonah manages to throw a little *Blair Witch* gag in, but there's nothing else for them to discover. When they get back out to the car, Haley is gone. Naturally, they panic and begin to shout and dash about to look for her, but 'something' overcomes them.

Nic awakes in a sterile-looking place, being pushed in a wheelchair by a man in a hazmat suit. He's brought to a table where someone introducing themselves as Dr Wallace Damon (Laurence Fishburne) is waiting to ask the disorientated lad some questions. "Can you recall the first time you encountered the signal?" Nic is puzzled, but Damon continues his monotone questioning, before explaining that the conversation they were having with 'Nomad' was, in fact, coming from something not of this Earth - an E.B.E. - extra-terrestrial biological entity. He also tells him that since he has had contact with it, they have no idea what they're dealing with and 'the possibility of alien contamination is very real'.

He's given a room but no more information, until he hears Jonah talking to him through the vent. They hatch a plan to escape using their advanced intellect to memorise escape routes and the pattern of the workers they have seen at the base. Haley is being kept in a coma in another room, but they are refusing to let him see her, too. The only problem being that apparently Jonah wasn't found by the hazmat crew.

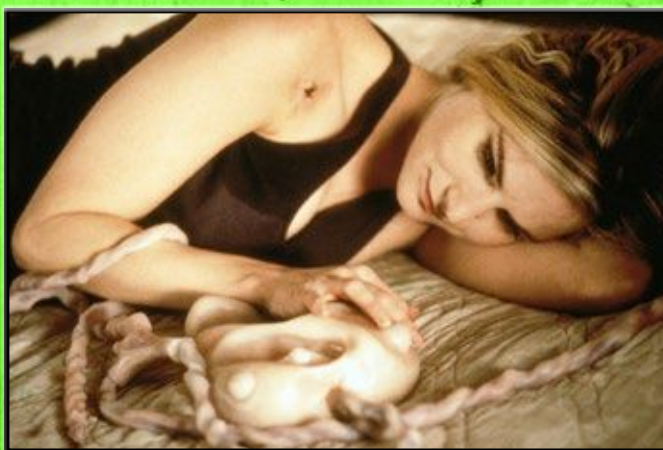
The Signal is an intelligent, slow-burn gem of a film that reveals its secrets like layers on an onion (without the tears). There's much more to it than we can fairly reveal, and it never stops surprising. Although shot on a low budget, it looks fantastic - in both the opening 'road movie' element and the later, more fantasy sci-fi scenario. The young leads are all exceptional (we expect nothing less from Olivia Cooke, obviously) and having the 'hero' being a disabled young man is a refreshing change. The opening focuses on the emotions of Nic - suffering from an illness that will ultimately leave him in wheelchair - as he struggles to come to terms with his girlfriend choosing to move away; it's filmed sensitively but gives the viewer an opinion that the boy isn't too strong. He's strong-willed, sure (we see him struggling to do simple things rather than accept help), but could he withstand what's to become of him? And when we find out what that is, it's equally handled sympathetically (you'll have to watch it to find out what that is exactly!). *The Signal* is a bold, complex (but not bogged down with exposition - one has to make their own mind up on several aspects) and often intensely atmospheric watch, and certainly a fascinating entry into the realm of intelligent sci-fi thrillers. Plus it has Lin Shaye being completely bonkers - what more do you want?

Special mention must be made, of course, for the fourth film in the Sci-Fear season: David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* (1999). As usual, the Canadian writer/director was way ahead of his time with this icky piece of body horror. Like his earlier masterpiece *Videodrome* (1982), *eXistenZ* looks at how technology is taking over our lives with sinister and sickening results. The focus this time is on video games, with organic game pods that plug straight into the spines of users via an umbilical cord, replacing the usual plastic controllers.

Jennifer Jason Leigh is Allegra Geller, a games designer who goes on the run following a failed assassination attempt. She convinces security guard Ted Pikul (Jude Law) to help her finish playing the only copy of her experimental game *eXistenZ*. What follows is a twisted visual treat, with the viewer never quite sure what is real and what is in the game, and some of Cronenberg's brilliantly visceral special effects. There's certainly no synopsis that could do the film justice; like *Naked Lunch*, it's a film best entered with little knowledge but an open mind.

The Sci-Fear season runs every Saturday in February on HORROR CHANNEL. Sky 319, Virgin 149, Freesat 138, Freeview 70.

eXistenZ



GAME OVER

BY SCOTT CLARK



As the most successful video game-sourced feature film series comes to an end, we look forward to what we can expect from

RESIDENT EVIL

THE FINAL CHAPTER...



The *Resident Evil* films might be the best video game adaptations put to screen. There, we said it.

The franchise, based on the Capcom survival horror games, answers a shameless call for dopey action-filled, effects-laden fun and delivers all with the subtlety of an undead horde. What series writer/producer/sometime-director Paul W. S. Anderson (not to be confused with Paul Thomas Anderson, winner of Oscars, wrangler of method actors) has done is craft a set of films that defy expectations at every turn. For every dodgy CGI monster, there's a gorgeous horror image. For every dud line of dialogue, there's a performance bonkers enough to sell it. Each film shows a desperation for escalation and change, so expectations are high for *The Final Chapter*.

Anderson clearly hasn't been told that video game adaptations are not successful. And after five instalments, he's also clearly missed the memo that promises the law of diminishing returns. Against all odds, the *Resident Evil* franchise has become the highest-grossing film franchise based on a video game. Fourteen years since the release of the first entry, the films have come a long way, turning an initial budget of \$35 million into an overall franchise gross of \$915.9 million. It's an impressive feat, with each film bringing in three, sometimes

four times its budget. Like the *Saw* series, *Resident Evil* has taken on a life of its own, forming a sturdy fan base off the back of the games to prove it can rake in the bucks irrespective of derisive critical opinion.

Even though Sony Distribution head Rory Bruer green-lit the project as far back as 2012, *Resi* fans have had to endure a four-year gap between films - the longest yet. *The Final Chapter* has been delayed by Milla Jovovich's pregnancy, budgeting issues, and some on-set accidents, one of which resulted in an amputation; the other, a fatality. It's been a rocky road, but at long last, *The Final Chapter* is within reach.

MY NAME IS ALICE...

Maybe one of the biggest issues with video game film adaptations is knowing the audience. With *Super Mario Bros.* back in 1993, the film took the airy fairy world of the Mario Bros and straight-up dunked it into '90s dirge much to fans' chagrin. It was stupid move and made game adaptations a shaky prospect for years to come. Perhaps the thing that works for Anderson and the *Resi* films is the constant evolution of the games themselves and thus the openness in the fan base for new things. The games were, after all, conceived in the self-aware post-Romero age by a knowing group of horror fans. How could anyone expect the films to stick to the limited spectrum of traditional Gothic and zombie flavours provided by the first few games?

If you look at the series on a wider spectrum, both have become more and more outlandish, surpassing their haunted house survival angle to become a miasma of short-term character work, bizarre monsters, and increasingly far-fetched sci-fi adventurism. The films have destroyed the world; the games have seemed reluctant to make that apocalyptic shift. Where Anderson's zeal has allowed him to pursue his action dreams, the game series is heading back to basics with a spookier seventh entry in direct reaction to backlash over action

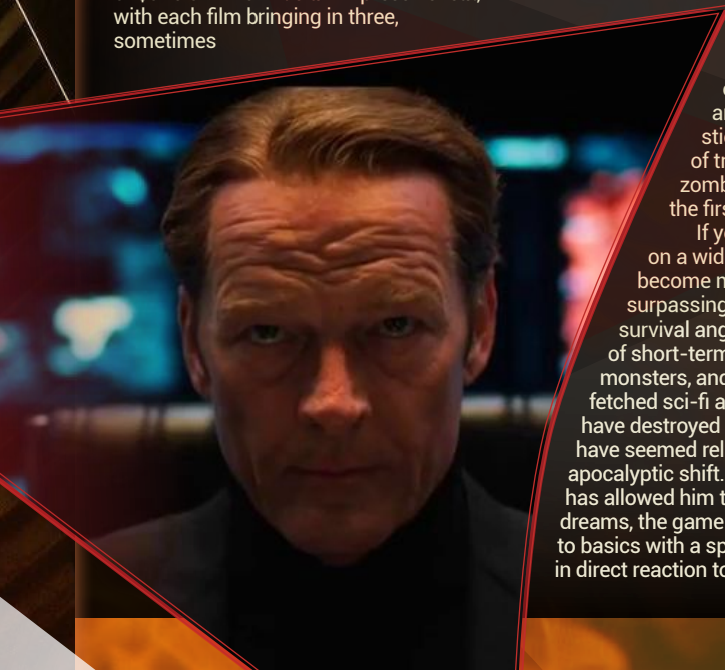
levels in *Resident Evil 6*. A large component of the film's success has been down to the dedication of its parts.

Anderson's wife, star Jovovich, has become a staple of the series and the only character to appear in all the films. Alice, an original character devised by Anderson for the films, has had a pretty bizarre journey but hers is a story integral to the success of the franchise, anchoring the audience's experience more successfully than the games in the long run.

Retribution finished up with Alice having her powers restored by Albert Wesker (Shawn Roberts), who broke her out of an Umbrella testing facility in order to draft her deadly services. It seems deranged artificial intelligence the Red Queen has taken over Umbrella Corp and is now setting out to destroy the surviving humans using an army of nightmarish mutants. Footage we've seen reveals that Alice will be heading back to the Hive, last seen in the first instalment, to locate an airborne antiviral that could put an end to the horror.

Bringing back the Red Queen nicely loops together a series that has mostly treated continuity with bombast. Anderson has retconned concepts with brutal simplicity, so it's difficult to know how much we can carry from *Retribution* through to *The Final Chapter*. Alice gained incredible powers at the end of the second film, found hundreds of her clones at the close of the third, lost the powers and clones within the first five minutes of the fourth, then got the powers back at the end of the fifth. Even the title of the upcoming entry is a potential retcon since its success might secure a future entry.

For this film, the pesky computer programme will be played by Jovovich and Anderson's daughter Ever Anderson, since previous Queen, Megan Charpentier, is too old to return. Ali Larter (*Heroes*) will be weighing in her kickass talents for Claire Redfield again, which is good news. Back in *Extinction* and *Afterlife*, Alice and Claire had some great scenes and further fanned the flames of *Resi*'s feminist readings. Tight leather jumpsuit or not, *Resident Evil* boasts a host of great female leads who aren't as much sexualised as they are positioned as infinitely more useful than most of the male characters. From Michelle Rodriguez's Rain





to Sienna Guillory's turn as fan-favourite Jill Valentine, there have been some great fights and face-offs, but unfortunately, neither will be returning.

Surprisingly, there's a whole pack of previous stars who won't be coming back for the supposed final chapter. Wentworth Miller (Chris Redfield), Johann Urb (Leon Kennedy), and Li Bingbing (Ada Wong) are off the menu. It's a shame, considering Bingbing and Urb were essentially cameo appearances in the fifth film for its battle royale finale. Furthermore, it's a shame we won't get to see more Jill Valentine since she spent most of the last movie as a brainwashed Umbrella pawn, controlled by the Red Queen.

As mentioned, the Red Queen is back, but perhaps more exciting is the confirmed involvement of Dr Isaacs, played by Iain Glen. The deranged Umbrella scientist was last seen heavily mutated thanks to copious amounts of T-Virus antiserum, then diced into bits by the laser corridor from the first film. Rather than have Glen come back simply as a clone, he'll be playing the original Dr Isaacs' twin brother, which feels just as pointless to be honest but hey, we're getting bonus Iain Glen. The star's recurring role in *Game of Thrones* makes him perfect buzz-bait for the film, as does the enlisting

of *Orange is the New Black*'s Ruby Rose and supermodel Rola.

Shawn Roberts will indeed be returning to provide his camp Machiavellian (and Agent Smith-inspired) take on Wesker, much to fans' excitement and terror. Overacting, underacting, who cares, Roberts clearly has a blast riffing off Jovovich and we could watch them scrap all day. His performance is one of the many hyper-gamey aspects of the films; touches that are marmite to viewers.

Anderson has a short attention span and gives off the vibe he isn't that bothered about the zombies. Like the games, the films have become increasingly reliant on mad genetic mutations and less about the bread and butter of the franchise. That's not to say he can't do zombies, though. The *Resi* films have had some superb gags and truly gross moments thanks to consistently ace choice in visual effects and make-up artists. From the swarms of murderous crows in *Extinction* to the giant Licker in *Retribution*; from Alice's insane telekinetic and pyrokinetic powers to the behemoth zombie Axeman in *Afterlife*, there's a lot more going on here than just a bunch of smelly corpses, but Anderson always finds new ways to use a monster that is becoming increasingly overused.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

Zombies are a tough business, there's no two ways about it, but the *Resident Evil* franchise has found a way to sustain itself off the living flesh of its more popular contemporaries. Anderson is a magpie by nature, visually quoting, thematically borrowing and ideologically dancing through a smorgasbord of influences. This pinching of popular ideas or sequences has almost made the *Resi* films more of a zeitgeist thing than an actual consistent sequence of films and characters. *Extinction* went full *Mad Max* with a touch of *Day of the Dead*. *Afterlife* seemed to soak up some of the heavy apocalyptic nihilism of *Silent Hill* whilst touching on *Matrix*-style combat and aesthetics. *Retribution* had elements of *Call of Duty*: *Zombies*, *Inception*, *The Hunger Games* and an opening that was pretty much lifted from Zack Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead* remake. So one of the big questions on the lead-up to *Resident Evil: The Final Chapter* is... what will make the cut?

It's been four years since the last instalment and a lot's happened. Will Anderson borrow fight sequences from *The Raid*? Could Alice start channelling



Scarlett Johansson's *Lucy*? It wouldn't be far-fetched to expect Donald Trump's presidency to get a look-in, especially when *Retribution* ended with Umbrella Corp CEO Albert Wesker taking over the White House in the middle of a hellscape battlefield. That kind of imagery seems more apt now, at the end of a dark 2016, than it did four years ago. From the trailer, it looks like *The Final Chapter* will at the very least be channelling its inner *Fury Road* with a bit of *World War Z* for good measure.

Never one to stand still for too long, Anderson has shifted the production team around somewhat for the final hurrah. In fact, there are few constants in the franchise, but the most important are arguably Anderson's scripts and Jovovich's Alice. Together, the two are the power couple of blockbuster horror: he sets them up, and she shoots the shit out of them. But the teams behind these films are still important.

The films have really come into their own since Anderson's re-entry to directing duties in *Afterlife*; the sillier aspects of the films really blossomed then but so did the dedication to all-out horror fun. It was in *Afterlife* too that the films really sealed in their visual style and penchant for epic horror imagery. Cinematographer

Glen Macpherson is returning to the series with his dour post-apocalyptic palette and hyper-clean futuristic vibes, which thankfully means *The Final Chapter* will fit in nicely with the last two films, the ones to really embrace the shameless game quality. Another great piece of news is that Brent Boates is back for storyboarding duties. The *Tron: Legacy* and *The Cabin in the Woods* artist has had a crucial role in translating ambitious video game imagery to the big screen in a way that works with Anderson's pulpier ideals, so again, we can't wait to see what's in store.

Production designer Edward Thomas joins Anderson's team for the first time and seems an odd choice. Thomas served as production designer on *Doctor Who* from 2005-2010, *Torchwood* between 2006-2011, and more recently returned to film with *Set Fire to the Stars*. It's unclear exactly how he will interpret Anderson's world, but assumedly he'll be able to get more with less, being used to BBC budgets. Which, of course, leaves more money for the unabashedly bombastic effects. And if there's something that goes hand-in-hand with this ambitious saga, it's a slathering of effects madness.

If we could compare the *Resident Evil*

franchise to anything, it would, aptly, be one of its T-virus infected creatures: once, a long time ago, this was a simple zombie, but after years of outside influence it's mutated into something frankly weird. There's an odd, near-undefinable charm to the films which might simply be sincerity. So, it's the highest-grossing, but we wonder, would it really be that far-fetched to call it the best video game adaptation put to screen? That is to say, the series of films that best embody the key qualities of both game and film.

Anderson and Jovovich are shameless fun-hounds and their enthusiasm is infectious. If the operatic *Matrix*-style action sequences, moody apocalyptic vibes, *Tekken*-inspired fight arenas, anti-capitalist messages, video game logic, or surprisingly epic imagery don't quite sell it, then maybe this franchise just isn't for you. Anderson is a haphazard wizard, a patron saint of shameless blockbuster morals, and *The Final Chapter* looks set to deliver everything we could possibly hope for. Consider us sold.

RESIDENT EVIL: THE FINAL CHAPTER opens in the US on January 27th and in the UK on February 3rd.

To commemorate the final film in the **RESIDENT EVIL** series, we take an exhaustive look back at the franchise's pixel-based source...

A full-page illustration of Leon S. Kennedy in his iconic black tactical uniform, holding a handgun and aiming it forward. He is surrounded by several zombie enemies in a dark, foggy forest setting. The title 'I REMEMBER EVERYTHING...' is written in a large, stylized, pixelated font across the bottom of the image.

I REMEMBER
EVERYTHING...

BY JAMES EVANS



It's now a full two decades since the first *Resident Evil* was released on the original PlayStation console and began a boom in similar survival horror games as well as kicking off a franchise that has encompassed more games, movies, novels, merchandise and even a themed restaurant in Tokyo. Memorably described as 'a subtle blend of lateral thinking and extreme violence' by Simon Pegg in *Spaced*, it's impressive to consider just how much *Resident Evil* (known as *Biohazard* in Japan) and its various offshoots are now embedded in our culture.

Survival horror was a term around for a short while prior to *Resident Evil* but quickly associated directly with the game upon its release, and it's considered the main progenitor of the genre. Its roots are in the horror role-playing game *Sweet Home*, a 1989 PC release that found you using the skills of five separate characters that only when put together could mean escape from the large mansion they found themselves trapped in. Creator Tokuro Fujiwara would later be involved in the original *Resident Evil* and many of the elements of *Sweet Home* found their way into the later title's gameplay. The other big influence on the direction the zombie-blasting classic would follow can be found in 1992's *Alone in the Dark*, another trapped-in-a-haunted-house tale for PC that required players to solve fiendish puzzles in the hope of getting out alive.

By 1996, console technology had evolved and the new generations of games that were being released allowed

for much more intense (and graphic) experiences. Visceral horror lends itself well to the gaming world, deeply immersing the player as it does in the events unfolding on screen. The games took influences from numerous films, undoubtedly the well-known zombie movies of George A. Romero but also haunted house films and other genre classics. *Sweet Home* itself was based on a Japanese film of the same name that invited comparisons to supernatural horrors like *The Haunting*. By the time *Resident Evil* came to be developed, the PlayStation afforded its creators the ability to make their ideas a vivid reality.

In *Resident Evil*, two police officers, Chris and Jill, from Raccoon City's S.T.A.R.S. (Special Tactics and Rescue Service) unit, find themselves trapped in a seemingly deserted mansion whilst searching for vanished colleagues of theirs. It wasn't long before a flesh-eating zombie was encountered and they realised that to get out was not going to be a simple case of running. The player had to solve puzzles, collect items, and backtrack throughout the mansion to advance. Health and ammo was limited and so encounters with the undead (as well as other creatures that try to stop the escape) became hair-raising and sweaty-palm inducing, just like the horror influences the game drew on.

The game was a smash hit and inevitably sequels followed. Each subsequent chapter added something new to the mythology of the T-Virus and the Umbrella Corporation conspiracy, as well as ramping up the tension of each

game with new monsters to fight (or most likely run away from screaming). Different games were made for different consoles and so the franchise took hold as a gaming behemoth. It didn't matter what console or computer you had, there was a version of *Resident Evil* you could play. Part of the attraction of the series was its adaptability. From solving puzzles to shooting zombies, at least some part of the mechanics could fit not just consoles but handheld devices like the Game Boy Colour and the 3DS.

As the games kept coming, the title started branching out into other media, like comics (the imaginatively titled *Resident Evil: The Official Comic Magazine*) and novels (initially tied-in as pre-order bonuses for new games). Writer S. D. Perry started with a novelisation of the first video game called *The Umbrella Conspiracy* and followed up with another six books that either adapted a game or was an original that linked in with the wider story the games followed.

It's inevitable that when something becomes a cultural phenomenon Hollywood comes calling. British writer and director Paul W. S. Anderson was given the task of translating the games to the big screen. Given that the original game was inspired by films, it was perhaps sensible of Anderson to take heavy inspiration from at least the first few titles when devising the opening film and try and craft something different. Milla Jovovich took the lead as Alice, a character created for the films and therefor unrelated to the game protagonists. Incorporating familiar



elements of the gaming world with references to the Umbrella conspiracy, the film then effectively becomes its own separate thing, no longer beholden to keeping cannon.

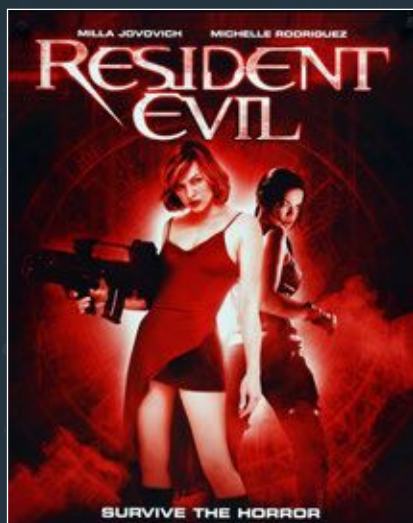
Resident Evil was a critical failure (something Anderson is no stranger to throughout his career) but a moderate hit with audiences. When the cash comes in, the sequels follow. Anderson has stayed involved, either writing, directing or producing all of the subsequent sequels. 2017 sees the release (although it was released in December 2016 in Japan) of the alleged 'final chapter' of the film series, bringing Alice's journey to an end. Each successive film has followed

the story of Alice as she discovers she has been genetically engineered, adding in clones, hordes of the undead, a virus-ravaged earth and setting up a final confrontation between Alice and the Umbrella Corporation. The first film set the critical bar low and the quality has not improved as each follow up has been released. Nevertheless, the series has many fans and it has proved to be a reliable money-spinner with total box office now heading for over \$1 billion dollars. The films themselves have been novelised and created their own strands of merchandise, pulling in an audience that knows little about the games they sprang from. And regardless of their flaws, the *Resident Evil* films have fared significantly better than *Alone in the Dark*. If we can be controversially critical for a moment regarding the films of Uwe Boll, that game eventually spawned a barely-related disaster of a film with Christian Slater (career renaissance in *Mr. Robot* was a full decade away for him) and Tara Reid. A sequel did follow but thankfully only the one.

Back with the game series, twelve different titles - including a remake of the first game for the GameCube console - had started to find audiences wearying of variations on a theme. Then the sixth official chapter of the ongoing plotline, *Resident Evil 4*, was released initially exclusively on the GameCube. It followed Leon Kennedy, first seen in *Resident Evil 2*, and now a special government agent. He's dropped into rural Spain to find the President's daughter who has been kidnapped by a sinister cult called Los

Illuminados (Spanish for 'the Enlightened Ones'). Deviating from the zombie virus plot of the earlier games, Leon discovers the cult is involved with a parasitic virus called Las Plagas. Victims of the parasite become murderously violent and Leon must fight chainsaw-wielding villagers amongst other new foes. Retaining the fixed camera gameplay of its forebears as well as that mix of lateral thinking and extreme violence, it gave the series a shot in the arm. The critical reception was unanimous in praise and players got an exciting mix of the familiar as well as the new (like when the first villager Leon fights decides to run towards him instead of a corpse-like shuffle).

Now a renewed critical success as well as a huge hit, the *Resident Evil* series was doing serious business on the new generation of consoles, notably being ported over for the Nintendo machine, the Wii, taking advantage of the then-new motion controls the Wii quickly became famous for. Meanwhile, perhaps in reaction to a film series that now bore little relation to the games that inspired it, Capcom in Japan decided to launch a computer animated film to carry on the stories of characters from the games. *Resident Evil: Degeneration* reunited Leon Kennedy and Claire Redfield, who had previously helped each other in the second game in the series. It continues the conspiracy plot that's now worldwide and acts as a bridge between the fourth and fifth *Resident Evil* games. *Resident Evil 5* shifts the action to Africa and breaks with the night-time-all-the-time approach of the series so far, setting





Resident Evil 7: Biohazard



the action mostly in the day, as the developers wanted to show off what they could do with the advanced technology of the new PlayStation and Xbox consoles. Action it very much is, too, with the series being influenced now by movies made in the wake of the first game, principally films like *28 Days Later*. Not considered as much of a success in gameplay terms as its predecessor, it didn't stop *Resident Evil 5* becoming the biggest title in the series so far, generating huge sales.

The next film in the Capcom series would follow, this time filling in the story between the fifth and sixth games. *Resident Evil: Damnation*, as with *Degeneration*, brought back Leon and he was now the main star of the animated films as well as continuing to be a major character in the games, with another sequel featuring Kennedy to follow in 2017. *Resident Evil 6* was released first on PS3 and Xbox 360 in 2012. Capcom had determined that the survival horror genre was too small for the size *Resident Evil* had become and while this iteration continues the conspiracy plot lines of the series, it also focused even more on action, rather than horror. It was perhaps as a consequence of this that the game took a dip in critical favour. Where previously, the games had their flaws or irritations (that fixed camera swinging around unhelpfully being a good example) but had overcome them, *Resident Evil 6* seemed to annoy more than had been hoped. By splitting the game's narrative into four playable strands, the weaknesses in gameplay and storyline were more apparent. As before reviewers

praised the graphics, lighting, and design of the game but this time around, a bigger consensus emerged that the series was now too far away from its horror roots.

Whatever reception awaited the games, the title of *Resident Evil* is now present across much more than games and even movies. For those inclined to pick up merchandise, you can get everything from the expected action figures to Halloween masks, replica T-Virus containers, clothing, posters, watches, key-rings and all number of things in-between. But if you're in Tokyo at some point, don't go looking for the Biohazard Cafe as it closed after only a year!

The upcoming release of *Resident Evil 7* has specifically set out to address criticisms of the direction the games were heading in as well as return it to those horror essentials. The developers have stated it will return to the basics of the series, drawing the scale back in and jettisoning the quick time elements and gun-heavy gameplay that had moved the series so far into action territory. The initial central character this time around is Ethan, and he's not a cop or soldier, but a man searching for his wife. He eventually follows her trail to a seemingly deserted mansion. After success bloats many film, television, and game franchises, and innumerable musicians have seen drugs and egos lead to losing sight of what made things special to start with, a common refrain is 'back to basics' and a promise this time will restore faith that the original magic can still be reclaimed. Is it possible this time for *Resident Evil*?

Notably, a playable teaser called *Beginning Hour* has suggested similarities with *Sweet Home*, so it seems those roots being returned to may predate even *Resident Evil* itself. Also, like the first game, the release of the newest game coincides with another leap forward in technology that should allow for players to be immersed in a way only achievable now. That comes in the form of VR on the PlayStation 4 (the game will also be released on Xbox One and for PCs). If, like two decades ago, new technology could work in partnership with those horror influences that have proven to be successful time and again, reclaiming that original magic could very well happen.

RESIDENT EVIL 7: BIOHAZARD is released for consoles and PC on January 24th.



2017: The year of H. G. Wells

by Tony Jones



The legendary author is set to get a boost in profile this year as some of his most famous works are adapted by BIG FINISH. STARBURST caught up with range producer David Richardson to discuss this project...

H. G. Wells is widely known, even among non-SF fans, as one of the pioneers of science fiction. He was born in Bromley in 1866, died in London in 1946. Why does this matter? It matters because under UK copyright law, it is now seventy years since his death, meaning his works are now out of copyright, and available to all. Big Finish is taking this opportunity to bring us six two-disc audio releases throughout the year - starting in January with **The Invisible Man**, starring John Hurt, Blake Ritson, Annette Badland, and Dan Starkey.

David's enthusiasm for H. G. Wells soon became clear: "I live in Bromley, Wells' birthplace, so I guess this project is also a little personal for me. In the town centre, there's a mural dedicated to his work, and I pass that at regular intervals all the time. Wells is part of the very fabric of our culture, and so it's brilliant to have the opportunity to make these adaptations. When I first spoke to our executive producers Jason Haigh-Ellery and Nicholas Briggs, the plan was just to do **The War of the Worlds**. But the more I immersed myself into Wells' catalogue, the

more I wanted to extend the project. And so the series of adaptations was born."

David also reflected on his appreciation of Wells' work: "I think if you're a fan of science fiction, which I obviously am, it's impossible not to have connected with Wells' novels throughout your life. I first came to them through Hollywood adaptations - **The Time Machine** and **The War of the Worlds** were staples of holiday viewing throughout my childhood - and reading the novels came later. They've influenced the genre profoundly: I'm sure that when Sydney Newman was first discussing the format that would become **Doctor Who**, **The Time Machine** would have been mentioned. We've all seen countless adaptations of **The Invisible Man**, and perhaps been bemused by some of the film adaptations of **The Island of Dr Moreau**! And who can't hum the music from **Jeff Wayne's War of the Worlds** from memory?"

The series starts with **The Invisible Man** and continues every other month with **The First Men in the Moon**, **The Shape of Things to Come**, **The Island of Doctor**



Moreau, The Time Machine, and The War of the Worlds. Having John Hurt appear in the first release is a measure of the both the stature of H. G. Wells and the reputation for quality Big Finish has long enjoyed. David spoke about the casting: "Casting has been a key element to this series. We knew that we wanted very prominent industry names, and actors who would connect with the material. John Hurt was a perfect choice for **The Invisible Man** – we'd greatly enjoyed working with him on our **War Doctor** audios, and he'd made no secret of the fact that he'd greatly enjoyed working with us too. I'd always remembered his compelling performance as Winston Smith in Michael Radford's film of **1984**, and I found it interesting that John was chatting about that in the green room while we were recording the Wells story. He is astonishing as Griffin [the invisible man of the title] – so powerful and threatening, and yet there's a pathos he brings to the character that is quite magical. I've heard the finished production, and I'm immensely proud of it, and Blake Ritson (*Indian Summers*) is magnificent as Kemp. He was our first choice before we'd even started writing the script."

"Nigel Planer, Gethin Anthony, and Chloe Pirrie are a glorious triumvirate in **The First Men in the Moon**. Nigel has a credit listing as long as my arm, and Gethin and Chloe are on their way to becoming huge stars – Gethin from **Game of Thrones** and co-starring with David Duchovny in **Aquarius**, and Chloe from major TV roles including **War and Peace**."

Other casting highlights include Sam Troughton, Nicola Walker, and Ronald Pickup.

The stories are adapted by a range of regular Big Finish writers, including Nick Briggs (**The War of the Worlds**), Marc Platt (**The Time Machine**), director Ken Bentley (**The Island of Doctor Moreau**), and Guy Adams. Directing duties are split between Ken Bentley, Lisa Bowerman, and Nick Briggs. Adaptations follow a range of approaches from keeping very true to the text to bringing them more up to date.

David explains further, "We've tried to keep them as authentic to the originals as possible, but not at the cost of making them as entertaining as possible. For example, **The Shape of Things to Come** would not have worked as a straight audio adaptation of the original text. So Guy, our writer, has come at it from a new angle which stays true to Wells' vision while making it compelling and thought-provoking for modern audiences. I found his script to be a real page-turner. **The Invisible Man** and **The First Men in the Moon** have been adapted by Jonathan Barnes, who writes

our **Sherlock Holmes** series. Jonathan is a natural at stories set in the Victorian era, and there's a beautiful authenticity and tone to his scripts."

"When we were discussing **The Island of Dr Moreau**, Ken Bentley threw his hat into the ring to adapt it, and his script is lovely – vibrant and dark and gripping, and charged with a relevancy that will leave listeners thinking."

During the recording process, David found Wells' stories still have a resonance even today: "We actually recorded **The Shape of Things to Come** two days after the American election, and the sense that our world is about to undergo a seismic shift made the material seem even more chilling than it did on the page."

With these six titles, Big Finish has covered the big science fiction novels, but Wells wrote much more than these. Not only did he write several fantastical short stories, he also wrote many other novels. At the moment, Big Finish has no plans to adapt any of these, but that might change if this run of audios is a big success. David clearly enjoyed the process of producing these titles and would no doubt be happy to dive back into the imagination of H. G. Wells. Perhaps other writers from this period could also be considered – STARBURST wouldn't be surprised to see an announcement of some Jules Verne stories, for example.

Whatever else happens, January 2017 brings us John Hurt as **The Invisible Man**, and that is more than enough to look forward to.

For more information on the BIG FINISH range, head over to bigfinish.com.



REVIEWS

THE LATEST BIG
SCREEN GENRE
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



ROGUE ONE: A STAR WARS STORY

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: GARETH EDWARDS / SCREENPLAY: CHRIS WEITZ, TONY GILROY /
STARRING: FELICITY JONES, BEN MENDELSON, DIEGO LUNA, DONNIE YEN, MADS MIKKELSEN,
ALAN TUDYK, RIZ AHMED, FOREST WHITAKER, JIANG WEN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Since J. J. Abrams' *The Force Awakens* kickstarted this new era of Disney-backed Star Wars, it's seemed as though the galaxy far, far away is never going to be that far away anymore. Already planned are Episodes VIII and IX, as well as 2018's currently untitled (Han) Solo movie. So with all this rejuvenated interest in the Star Wars galaxy after George Lucas had seemingly gone full circle with 2005's *Revenge of the Sith*, how does this new film fare, as it looks back at how the rebels acquired the Death Star plans before the events of 1977's *A New Hope*?

Normally at this point it would be customary to go through the plot, but as the film has just hit cinemas and the spoilers are strong with this one, we will leave it at that last sentence in terms of synopsis (is that a word?). A few complaints were hurled at *The Force Awakens* for copying the plot of *A New Hope* and lacking its own identity, but those complaints cannot possibly apply here as Gareth Edwards (*Monsters*, *Godzilla*) accomplishes his mission of putting the 'wars' back into Star Wars. *Rogue One* is a Star Wars film we never expected to sit through and has the potential to be very polarising (heck, out of the viewing party this writer was with, one

loved it and the other hated it). This is very much a film that respects the franchise but also constantly reverts to established tropes to deliver a movie that may take you aback by how unusual but compelling it is.

From the brilliant set design (marred slightly if you see it in 3D) and mixture of practical effects and CGI (which is used to basically do the impossible at a few points - you'll know what we mean when you see the film) to an operatic soundtrack by Michael Giacchino, who riffs on John Williams intermittently but mostly does his own thing, this is aesthetically Star Wars but inescapably different. Your level of love for the film will depend on how you take to the new creative decisions and to the tying up of events leading to the original film. However, whatever your reading, *Rogue One* is a must-see event that presents a hellish war, with a theme of hope's power to inspire mistreated masses and an unflinching presentation of the loss that comes with conflict. The references could be accused of fan service but the film is engaging bold, and ingenious in how it ties to the established story of *A New Hope*.

Obviously we won't go too much into which characters are here and what they are doing but each one plays a part

in the story. Felicity Jones makes for a fine lead as the defiant Jyn Erso, as great support is offered by the main cast of talented names. However, the best performance in the film is probably Ben Mendelsohn's villainous turn as the cruel and callous Imperial Director Orson Krennic, who makes for a firm hand grasping the rebels' throats throughout the film. However, Alan Tudyk's motion capture/vocal performance as Rebel droid K-2SO is another surefire scene-stealer, with his sardonic comedic asides providing some much-needed uplift to what is a rather dark film.

Rogue One sure pulls no punches; it is a gritty war picture that perfectly captures a galaxy ruled and impoverished by the tyranny of the cold and clinical Empire. Speaking of which, we are sure you know a certain helmet-wearing Sith Lord is a part of the film, as he has practically dominated the promotion. And believe us when we say that Vader's usage in the film is simply perfect, as he becomes a bogeyman to the story. All in all, expect the unexpected from *Rogue One*; it is a movie that really will benefit from revisits, especially come the mesmerising finale, which has your heart beating more rapidly than the blasters of a TIE Fighter.

We all expected a great time but this reviewer was so taken aback by the absorbing results of this offering that rating it was nigh-on impossible before seeing it again. Make no mistake, this is a Star Wars story worth telling, seeing, and exploring. The results are spectacular, possibly divisive and most certainly astounding, just like the best films should be. War is hell, but Star Wars is quite the opposite for cinemagoers.

JACK BOTTOMLEY

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★ 9

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★ 9





ASSASSIN'S CREED

CERT: 12A / **DIRECTOR:** JUSTIN KURZEL / **SCREENPLAY:** MICHAEL LESSLIE, ADAM COOPER, BILL COLLAGE / **STARRING:** MICHAEL FASSBENDER, MARION COTILLARD, JEREMY IRONS, BRENDAN GLEESON, CHARLOTTE RAMPLING / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Throughout the years, we have been treated to many video game-to-film monstrosities from Super Mario Bros. to Doom, from DOA: Dead or Alive to Hitman: Agent 47, and of course, the absolute abomination of them all in Uwe Boll's significant 'masterpiece' Bloodrayne. There have been a handful of mildly enjoyable ones, though, including Mortal Kombat and Warcraft: The Beginning, and guilty pleasures like Street Fighter and Lara Croft: Tomb Raider. However, everyone was hopeful for Assassin's Creed, and it's not surprising considering the talent involved. It's the same team that brought us the damn impressive Macbeth in 2015 with director Justin Kurzel returning to helm, as well as stars Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard. What could possibly go wrong? Well, pretty much everything, really.

In truth, Assassin's Creed is a joyless experience and a convoluted, confusing, and frustrating watch on top of that. Like the games, the film flashes back and forth between ancient times at the height of the Spanish Inquisition and the present day with the Abstergo Foundation, but here we switch timelines much more frequently than in the games, which makes it infuriating for audiences, especially when watching it for the first time. You are not allowed any time to soak in the feel and atmosphere of the past because the intercutting between the two time periods constantly interrupts the flow of the movie. As a result, this choppy editing ruins the action sequences, as does the annoying shaky cam that's on display.

Also, because you spend so little time in the past, you fail to connect with any of the

characters in that period, so there's limited emotional engagement with the Assassin Brotherhood and the two assassins, Aguilar de Nerha and Maria. Actually, you could pretty much cut out all the scenes set during the Spanish Inquisition and it wouldn't affect the movie whatsoever. This was also a pretty lacklustre attempt at capturing the story, tone, and feel of the games, as nothing is really explained in great detail. For example, the film continually addresses the Apple of Eden over and over again, yet never feels the need to explain its full significance. In fact, the story plays out almost like a Dan Brown story more than anything else (yikes!) with a lot of unintentional hilarity, confusion, and plot holes afoot.

Michael Fassbender, Marion Cotillard, and Jeremy Irons all try their best to inject some life into this movie, but their talents are completely wasted as the story gives them nothing to work with, and as a result, you don't care about their characters and they just come off as generic cardboard cutouts. Plus, the movie is surprisingly bloodless considering the games were made for an adult audience and the fact that Kurzel's Macbeth was a visceral and raw experience. Whether he just didn't put in the work or was prevented from going the extra mile by studio executives remains to be seen, but what we get is a film that's oddly toothless as a result.

It looks pretty to look at, some of the action is cool, and the actors try their best, but what we have is a jumbled, confused, uninvolved splat that lacks in the areas of plot, character development, editing

and pacing, and spends far too much time within a certain time period that wasn't engaging to begin with. This is a real shame because the Assassin's Creed video game franchise is a damn impressive one (mostly), and it deserves a great movie, so the potential was there. It's just a travesty that this was the best that they could do, so for now, it's probably best to stick with the games themselves.

RYAN POLLARD

EXPECTED + + + + + + + + + + 7

ACTUAL + + + + + + + + + + 3





LA LA LAND

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: DAMIEN CHAZELLE / STARRING: RYAN GOSLING, EMMA STONE, J. K. SIMMONS, ROSEMARIE DEWITT / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Boy, they really don't make movies like this anymore, do they? A love letter to Hollywood, romance and ambitious dreams, Damien Chazelle's *La La Land* is nothing short of an absolute triumph in every way possible. If you go into the film expecting an all-singin', all-dancin' tribute to those classic Hollywood musicals from the golden age then that's only part of the film's charm. This is a film that can be enjoyed by all audiences universally, being daringly structured, intricately detailed, gorgeously shot, beautifully performed and substantially well written. Building upon the promise of *Whiplash*, which in itself was a music-driven movie about artistry, Chazelle demonstrates with this film that he is a special filmmaking talent, in fact, one of the brightest talents currently working in American cinema.

What this film is about is the struggles of conforming and not conforming, and all the possibilities and gains that can be found in between. For years, Hollywood has been marketed as the land of dreams, yet it's evidenced by this film that those dreams are crushed down by a pile of bigger dreams that can never find fruition, and even if they do, there can be costs to yourself, your personal life and the relationships that have been formed because of them. Both of our main protagonists in Mia and Sebastian are struggling artists trying to conform to the new age of modern art in cinema and music, while also desperately trying to love. They plot, hope, dream and fight for their 'big break', even if life's realities intervene.

With music composed by Justin Hurwitz and Justin Paul, the songs in this film are vivid and alive; whether it's 'City of Stars', 'Audition' or 'Dreamers', each of these songs pays tribute to the musicals of yesteryear without ever feeling like copycat pastiches. Likewise, Chazelle complements the songs by filming his sequences in a way that feels blissfully romantic and elegant, while also having its own particular style and class, and Linus Sandgren's cinematography is beautiful to behold. You can take almost any frame in the movie, and it could be painting that can be found in a modern art gallery. The sequence in particular where our romantic duo visits LA's Griffith Observatory is simply an unashamedly starry-eyed experience.

Reuniting for a third outing together after *Crazy, Stupid, Love* and *Gangster Squad*, Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling both deliver career-best performances; their chemistry together is at the centre of this film and the emotions are on show without restriction. Emma Stone is the one who stands out the most, displaying a wonderful array of raw emotions that ranges from ecstatic highs of love and joy to the painful and tearful lows. Ryan Gosling, too, has never been better, nailing the emotional intensity, while also maintaining a sardonic wit throughout. Also, his piano playing is quite remarkable with no sleight of hands or cheat cutaways to be found.

During the last year, we were treated to many movies that were special and unique in their own way, particularly the likes of *Arrival*,

Captain America: Civil War, and *The Edge of Seventeen*. However, *La La Land* is not just a bona fide masterpiece but also the best film of the year bar none, capturing the true nature of Hollywood and Los Angeles in a way that's both unconventional and surprising. In an age of relaunched, remakes, and reboots, this reignites a long-lost fire in cinema that almost feels like being awake in a wondrous dream like no other.

RYAN POLLARD

EXPECTED ++++++++ 9

ACTUAL ++++++++10





PASSENGERS

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: MORTEN TYLDUM / SCREENPLAY: JON SPAIHITS / STARRING: JENNIFER LAWRENCE, CHRIS PRATT, MICHAEL SHEEN, LAURENCE FISHBURNE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Once featured on The Black List's best unproduced screenplays (originally to be made with Keanu Reeves and Reese Witherspoon), writer Jon Spaihts' *Passengers* is a film about the troubles of isolation, solitude and the moral arguments of self-sacrifice, all glossed over thanks to high production values and handsome leads in both Chris Pratt and Jennifer Lawrence. This, in some ways, is indication as to what lies at the heart of the film's problems, being the classic case of all style but no substance. Granted, the ideas are present, but *Passengers* never follows through on those concepts, and what we have is a film that is solid and entertaining enough, if somewhat lacking in edge and depth.

While the movie gets off to an impressive start, the story slowly falls apart progressively after that, and a lot of the major, crucial events that end up transpiring, as well as the reasons that are given, end up feeling far too convenient as a result. Laurence Fishburne's character, for example, is only included just to be a glorified *deus ex machina*. There are multiple contrivances and occasional plot holes scattered throughout, which all culminate in an overblown final act that feels the need to trump *Gravity*, *Interstellar*, and *The Martian*'s big finales in terms of size and scale, and the so-called 'happy ending' is just dire. Apparently, Spaihts' original ending was to have been a lot darker and more mature than what we get

on screen, which makes this new ending feel very obvious and forced in execution. Also, on a minor note: why the hell was Andy Garcia in this movie for a fleeting, non-speaking cameo?!

Despite many issues plaguing the film, there is still enjoyment to be found. The visual design of this movie is impressive; the design both of the interior and exterior of the Avalon spaceship is truly remarkable and unique. Plus, some of these sets prove to be crucial to some impressive sequences, particularly the inventive swimming sequence within zero gravity. To add to that, Rodrigo Prieto's cinematography is simply stunning and Thomas Newman's score is inspiring and inventive.

But the main selling point of this movie is the romantic duo of Chris Pratt and Jennifer Lawrence, and together they do the best with what's given to them, even if it's not really enough. Pratt manages to pull off the average guy shtick convincingly well, making us buy into his inner struggles, desires, and demons, whilst still maintaining his trademark likeability. Despite receiving top-billing, Lawrence gets less screen time than Pratt, yet still manages to give off a solid, emotionally investing performance that almost makes us forgive her for her phoned-in turn in *X-Men: Apocalypse*. Together, the chemistry is strong, yet it's Michael Sheen that almost steals the show right from under their noses as the ship's suave, cool, optimistic, and delightful robot bartender.

Overall, while *Passengers* isn't a bad movie in any way, there are teething problems that prevent it from being the legendary and epic sci-fi romance it could've been. Whether those problems lay with Jon Spaihts, director Morten Tyldum, or the exec-suits at Sony remains to be seen, but what we have is a gorgeously shot, brilliantly acted, extremely ambitious movie that ends up being nothing more than just okay. There is fun to be found, but when all is said and done, the eyes may be sated, but the brain's still craving.

RYAN POLLARD

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★ 9

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★ 6



REVIEWS

THE LATEST HOME
VIDEO RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



THE TRANSFORMERS: THE MOVIE – 30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

BD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: NELSON SHIN / SCREENPLAY: RON FRIEDMAN / STARRING: PETER CULLEN, JUDD NELSON, LEONARD NIMOY, FRANK WELKER, ORSON WELLES / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

To many, Michael Bay's big screen cinematic Transformers franchise is merely a shell of what so many of us have ingrained in our memories. You see, there's a whole generation who grew up on a Transformers property that was fun, engaging, vibrant, easy to digest, and without gratuitous explosions or needless shots of Megan Fox's behind. And in amongst that beloved property was a 1986 movie that blew our fragile little minds. Now, Manga Entertainment has put together a new HD release of *The Transformers: The Movie* to celebrate the film's 30th anniversary. The question here, though, is whether this new release of an old favourite is worth your time.

For those unfamiliar with the '86 effort, the action initially centres on the seemingly never-ending battle between the Optimus Prime-led Autobots and the Megatron-fronted Decepticons. Taking place after the second season of the Transformers cartoon series - and bringing in plenty of new characters to join our familiar faces - a brutal assault on Autobot City from the Decepticons leaves casualties on both sides, but it's the new threat of the planet-devouring Unicron (voiced by the legendary Orson Welles in his last ever role) that brings an even bigger problem for our Robots-in-Disguise. To veer any further into story details would head towards spoiler territory for anybody who's yet to see *The Transformers: The Movie*,

so we'll leave it there on that front. Safe to say, there's plenty of action, warmth, heartbreak, and some true acts of utter villainy as the tale unravels.

Whilst the film itself is as fantastic as ever, a true time capsule of its period, the real nitty gritty on this release revolves around things other than the frenetic, pulsating and emotional story itself. To celebrate the movie's 30th anniversary, we're given a cleaned-up, crisp remaster of the film, and it never looks anything less than stunning. At the time of its release, *The Transformers: The Movie* was groundbreaking with so much of its animation work, and here we get to see this already impressive animated affair looking truly awe-inspiring. Added to that, the hair metal-driven soundtrack and score from the likes of Vince DiCola and Stan Bush never sounded better, with the musical beats perfectly capturing the emotion of the action, be it delivering a sense of dread and sorrow, or simply making the viewer feel as pumped up as a kid full of too many Skittles.

Where the bonus material is concerned, most notable about this new release is the 'Til All Are One documentary. Just shy of an hour in length, this retrospective is a must-see for fans of the Transformers, and we get to see input from some of the key cast and crew involved in the film. The audio commentary included is one that also accompanied the 20th anniversary

release, but that doesn't make it any less interesting. Similarly, some of the featurettes have been seen before, although there are also a couple of nice new additions that look at the process of restoring this classic for its 2016 release.

Yes, it was initially used as a tool to introduce a new range of Transformers toys, but *The Transformers: The Movie* is a breathtaking, brilliant, at times brutal, balls-to-the-wall animated movie that perfectly captures the fist-pumping adrenalin and heart of its time. And with this new release from Manga Entertainment, fans have finally been given the release that their inner child has always yearned for. Brimming with extras and being exemplary in its restoration work, *The Transformers: The Movie – 30th Anniversary Edition* is an extraordinary release that's nothing short of a must-have for anybody who's ever tried to mimic the noise of a robot transforming into a vehicle during their younger days and beyond. If you thought these modern times of Michael Bay bastardising your childhood memories made for some bleak viewing experiences, prepare to light your darkest hour.

Extras: 'Til All Are One retrospective documentary / Audio commentary / Five featurettes / Animated storyboards / Original theatrical trailers / TV spots

ANDREW POLLARD

★★★★★★★★★★10





THE SHALLOWS

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JAUME COLLET-SERRA / SCREENPLAY: ANTHONY JASWINSKI / STARRING: BLAKE LIVELY, ÓSCAR JAENADA, SEDONA LEGGE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Yes, yes, yes, this is indeed another shark movie, but don't let that put you off. In a murky subgenre sea of misdemeanours, *The Shallows* manages to do what is an extreme rarity these days: be an actually great shark film.

Plot-wise, *The Shallows* keeps it remarkably, refreshingly simple. As the film opens, we find Nancy (Blake Lively) heading towards an isolated beach that held a special place in the heart of her sadly deceased mother. Once there, her plan is to go for a quiet, peaceful dip in the ocean with nothing more than her surfboard and her thoughts. Unfortunately for poor Nancy,

though, her curiosity at the sight of a floating whale corpse leads to her running across a *Carcharodon carcharias*, better known as a great white shark, that hasn't taken too well to having its feeding time disrupted. One well-timed bite later leaves our protagonist with an ever-worsening wound as she finds herself stranded on a small rocky mound that's only a couple of hundred meters from shore. The problem is, with the impending rise of the tide soon to leave Nancy's safe haven submerged, and with no one in sight or even contactable, not to mention the threat of gangrene and battling the elements, the constantly circling great white

shark isn't going away any time soon as it awaits its moment to strike at its next meal.

To describe *The Shallows* as minimal and small scale would be an understatement. In fact, you could easily list the cast as merely Blake Lively, a shark, and the wonderfully named Steven Seagull, and the locations used for the film are basically just a secluded beach and the water in its immediate vicinity. Fear not, though, for what the film keeps small when it comes to cast, location, and plot, it makes up for in high stakes, nail-biting tension as we see a classic survival tale of man vs. nature unravel through *The Shallows'* frenetic and sharp 86-minute runtime.

Praising Jaume Collet-Serra's movie as a great shark movie is likely as reaffirming as saying that *Sharknado* is the best of the *Sharknado* movies – it is, but that isn't really saying much. So with that in mind, not only is Collet-Serra's *The Shallows* a truly exceptional shark movie, it's generally an all-round exceptional movie, period. Complete with absolutely stunning scenery (with reportedly only 10% of the film actually shot on location – Australia's Gold Coast – and the rest shot in a giant water tank) and some rather ingeniously used editing choices, the tension involved here really does play out

like the proverbial rollercoaster ride; following every moment of calm and tranquility is an adrenaline-inducing rush of fear and panic. Added to this, the use of the shark itself is masterful. Not only is the expert killing machine largely kept menacingly under the surface, but the beautiful beast is actually an entirely digital creation, with the authenticity of the shark a real credit to the VFX team involved with this picture.

In the ocean of shark films out there, *The Shallows* really is one of the big fish. Since *Jaws* way back in 1975, there's been literally only a handful of really great shark movies – most notably 2010's *The Reef* – but this is one dip in the water that you won't want to miss out on. A true standout film of the year, with a measured, accomplished performance from Blake Lively only further holding your attention, *The Shallows* certainly has bite by the bucketload and it's hands down one of 2016's most intense, engaging thrill rides.

Extras: *Four featurettes / Deleted scenes / Previews*

ANDREW POLLARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 9



MAGNUM P.I.: THE COMPLETE SERIES

BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: TOM SELLECK, JOHN HILLERMAN, ROGER E. MOSLEY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Fabulous Films is giving cult '80s television the treatment it deserves. Having already restored the complete series of *The A-Team*, *Airwolf*, and *Knight Rider*, *Miami Vice*, and *The Incredible Hulk*, there are hours of television available for all ardent fans and newcomers alike seeking to immerse themselves

in the most beloved shows of a bygone era. However, for now, we're going to focus on *Magnum P.I.*, which is undoubtedly one of the most incredible and quintessentially '80s things you're likely to see.

But rest assured we're not exaggerating when we say there are hours of television time in your future should you purchase

this set – an impressive 130 of them for that matter, spanning 157 episodes over the course of 8 seasons. That's 7813 minutes of explosive action, frantic chases and basking in the glory of one of the greatest characters to ever grace popular television. Are you ready to handle it?

The series follows Tom Sullivan Magnum IV (Tom Selleck), a retired soldier and private investigator who oscillates between bringing criminals to justice and living a life of hedonism in Hawaii. After accepting a job to work as a security advisor to a famous author, he soon realises that the island isn't a sand-coated paradise after all, as there is a dirty criminal underworld in need of a clear-out – the kind only a man of his skills and unbridled quest for justice can provide. He also has one mighty moustache. All in all, this is like the typical male fantasy personified in the form of an icon we can all root for.

Unfortunately, there are

no special features on the set. That said, the restoration looks absolutely stunning here; if you're familiar with the show then you'll be pleased to know that it's never looked this good. If you're going to relive the experience, you certainly won't be disappointed with this transfer. However, if you're a newcomer then this is the perfect introduction to the iconic series that will show you just why most of us fell in love with it in the first place.

Overall, this set is highly recommended. There aren't many better shows out there for providing this level of quality when it comes to pure entertainment. It's an easy show to watch, but don't be surprised if you find yourself hooked on its charms. Revisiting this set is like spending time with an old friend – a friend who has never looked so good after all these years.

KIERAN FISHER

★★★★★★★★★★ 9



THE DRILLER KILLER (1979)

DUAL / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: ABEL FERRARA / SCREENPLAY: NICHOLAS ST. JOHN / STARRING: ABEL FERRARA, CAROLYN MARZ, BAYBI DAY, HARRY SCHULTZ / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When it comes to the certain generation of blood-soaked, so-called depraved movies labelled 'video nasties', one of the most notorious of the bunch is Abel Ferrara's *The Driller Killer*, originally released in 1979 but completely banned in the UK between 1984 and 1999. Whilst versions of the film have since aired on UK TV and been made available on home release, the great guys over at Arrow Video have now given this infamous little picture a new HD restoration for a packed Blu-ray release. The question is, though, is this much talked about movie all hype, and is this new release worth your time?

Plot-wise, *The Driller Killer* centres on Reno Miller (Abel Ferrara), a struggling New

York City artist who's using the brutal acts seen on local streets to inspire his masterpiece. With the pressure mounting and creative block setting in, Reno soon starts to lose his grip on reality as he takes matters into his own hands and starts to kill local homeless people in an attempt to get his spark back. Unaware that he's carrying out such acts, we see Reno's descent into madness, all accompanied by a blood-soaked canvas and his weapon of choice: a power drill.

The Driller Killer itself is very much Abel Ferrara's picture. Unable to find someone to take the lead role, director Ferrara, who was making his feature film debut here, was left with no other option than to tackle

the part himself. His Reno has roommates-cum-girlfriends Carol (Carolyn Marz) and Pamela (Baybi Day) for company, and punk musicians Tony Coca-Cola and the Roosters and their all-day, all-night band practice reside in the apartment next door, but this picture is all about Ferrara's Reno and his ever-diminishing grip on reality.

As a film, *The Driller Killer* is nowhere near as shocking as the notoriety around it would suggest. That's not to say that there's not some wince-inducing moments along the way, with one particular driller attack still as grim as it was the first time around, but Ferrara's movie is one built on suspense and mental instability more than gore and gratuitous bloodshed. Considering Ferrara went on to helm such well-received efforts as *Ms. 45*, *King of New York*, *Bad Lieutenant*, and *The Funeral*, this film isn't up to the standards of those in quality; this is his first feature and it tells. With next-to-no budget and a cast of complete unknowns, Ferrara managed to get the very most out of what he had at his disposal, and *The Driller Killer* has some surprisingly strong performances, coupled with a vibe and attitude that's a great look into the gritty punk atmosphere of New York City at that time period.

Where this release really shines, however, is on the audio

commentary with Abel Ferrara. From a personal point of view, this reviewer interviewed Abel last year, and his thoughts and words are always fantastic to listen to. And that's no different with the chat track included on this release, with Ferrara a mesmerising presence who is never anything but honest when looking back at one of the most infamous films in movie history. Similarly, the accompanying interview with Ferrara, the lookback at his filmography, and the Mulberry St. documentary that looks at the location so often used in his films are all great watches that add extra insight and work as the perfect accompaniments to this new release.

The Driller Killer may well be very much of its time, and it may not be as nasty as certain film boards would have you believe, but as a piece of film history it's must-see, and this overall package is a fascinating look into one of the most notorious movies to have come out of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Extras: *Commentary with Abel Ferrara / Laine and Abel: An Interview with The Driller Killer / Willing & Abel: Ferraraology 101 / Mulberry St. / Trailer*

ANDREW POLLARD

★★★★★★★ 7



LIGHTS OUT

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: DAVID F. SANDBERG / SCREENPLAY: ERIC HEISSERER / STARRING: TERESA PALMER, GABRIEL BATEMAN, MARIA BELLO, ALEXANDER DIPERSIA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Taking inspiration from the viral short film by the same director, the big screen debut of David F. Sandberg delves into one of our most primal fears - the dark - and crafts a film that's big on jumps. But is it truly scary?

A family torn to shreds, some of them literally, by a combination of mental illness and the supernatural have to come together to combat

a menacing ghostly figure attached to Mum (or Mom, as it's American). Can estranged older daughter Rebecca put aside the trauma of her past to help her little brother, a child caught between a mother struggling to keep her head and the demonic presence of her friend, Diana?

As a short film, *Lights Out* was perfect. At just three minutes, it took our fear of the

dark and reminded us of how we all felt at some point as a child who believed in monsters and wanted the landing light left on. In fairness, the feature-length version does a pretty decent job of stretching this out, setting out its store in a terrifying opening which reflects the short's effectiveness. The characters are nicely realised, the set-ups work, and the performances are endearing. Refreshingly, it reveals some of its secrets early on, leaving us in little doubt about what Diana is up to and the fact that Mom is the key to the whole shadowy puzzle.

As horror film monsters go, Diana certainly delivers, even if her name falls short of shivering the spine. Early glimpses of her are bloody creepy. She exists only in the dark and the filmmakers cleverly make us fear every dark area of the frame as the film progresses, making us convinced that she's going to leap out of every shadow at any minute. It draws to mind

both *The Babadook* and *It Follows* in its sense of menace. But *Lights Out* isn't as effective as either of those films. Diana lacks the motivation to explain why exactly she's got it in for her friend's family, and the filmmakers rely too much on loud bangs and sudden bursts of shrieking music to make us jump. There could have been a little more tying up at the end - how will they explain *THAT* to the police? Also, the connection with mental health issues and the supernatural is dubious to say the least.

Still, jump we do, and there are enough of them to make *Lights Out* a worthwhile watch. It won't linger in the mind for too long like great horror does, but you may want to leave that landing light on for a night or two... just in case.

ROBERT MARTIN

★★★★★★★ 7



WORM

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: DOUG MALLETT / STARRING: JOHN FERGUSON, SHANE O'BRIEN, JES MERCER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It's the near future, and mankind has lost the ability to dream. But all is not lost, for a company called Fantasites has produced a solution to the problem: a small worm that you can insert through your ear and that will, on a nightly basis, give you that facility back. So far so icky, but from a premise that might have given any other filmmaker the wherewithal to explore the speculative possibilities of such a scenario, Doug Mallett (in his debut feature, an expansion of

his short of the same name) has actually fashioned something that is mostly rather sweet – and that concentrates on its characters as much, if not more, than it does the situation.

John Ferguson plays Charles, a socially awkward maintenance man at a small, out of the way and somewhat rundown apartment block in Tennessee, and who considers Shane O'Brien's Reed (who works in the news department at the local TV station, a subplot

that brings the various strands of the story together) his best friend, despite the fact that the two of them barely speak beyond the bare necessities; Reed can't stand him. But Reed has begun a program of Fantasites, which not only bring back the ability to dream but as a knock-on effect also promote virility. When Charles accidentally stumbles on Reed's girlfriend June (Jes Mercer) dressed in nothing more than a towel, he determines to start taking the Fantasites he can't afford, just as the worms' less appealing side issues begin to be reported on the news...

There's no writers' credit on Worm, because the cast improvised the entire film without a script – albeit obviously not without a very good idea of what they were doing. Using news report cutaways to illustrate the situation as it affects the three protagonists, Mallett's film actually focuses far more on its canine-enabled love triangle than it does the consequences of using Fantasites, although as it moves into its latter half that storyline does begin to increasingly influence

our principals, and there are some sequences thereafter that are much more traditionally genre-inspired.

The upside of Mallett's approach is that his characters are much more believable, well performed and 'real' than they generally are in films of a similarly limited budget. Ferguson, in particular, is never less than thoroughly convincing as the inept but enthusiastic Charles, although all three of the main stars are remarkably accomplished. The downside is that although Worm maintains a coherency throughout, it might have done with a little more authorial focus and a touch more humour among its satire, pathos and tragedy.

Nevertheless, Mallett's film comes slightly cautiously but mostly highly recommended, to anyone with a strong stomach and a warm heart.

Extras: Audio commentary / Original short film / Deleted scenes / Trailers

JR SOUTHALL

★★★★★★★ 7



CREEPY

DUAL / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: KIYOSHI KUROSAWA / SCREENPLAY: CHIHIRO IKEDA, KIYOSHI KUROSAWA / STARRING: HIDETOSHI NISHIJIMA, YÜKO TAKEUCHI, TORU BABA, RYÖKO FUJINO / RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 23RD

Kiyoshi Kurosawa, director of cult horror Pulse, writes and directs the psychopath thriller Creepy adapted from the novel by Yutaka Maekawa.

After the capture and interrogation of a psychopath goes disastrously wrong detective Takakura (Hidetoshi Nishijima) leaves the police force and becomes a lecturer on criminology at a university. Takakura and his wife Yasuko (Yûko Takeuchi) have moved house to a neighbourhood where it turns out their

neighbours keep to themselves. One of their neighbours, Nishino (Teruyuki Kagawa), appears to be the same until he suddenly becomes overly friendly. Meanwhile, Takakura is lured back into detecting after his colleague tells him about the unsolved disappearance of a family from six years ago.

Creepy is a statement of intent as well as a comment upon its characters. Kurosawa favours the slow burn and subtle building of tension in Creepy, like with Pulse, rather

than the bang and shock of blockbuster horrors, which makes it all the more effective. The film builds up a feeling that everything is off and that Takakura and his wife are wandering into something they should avoid. Neighbour Nishino is a slippery and untrustworthy character, played by Teruyuki Kagawa with his wide eyes and frog-like face, who flips from indifferent and rude to overly friendly. Something definitely seems off with him but his sudden willingness to make friends and his normal and bright-eyed daughter makes you feel like maybe he's just a product of a hostile and alienating street.

The psychopath antagonist in Creepy is a skilled manipulator, getting innocent victims to commit the crimes for him while keeping his hands (relatively) clean. Kurosawa, no relation to the one you're thinking of, is a skilled manipulator himself, subtly playing with light and depth to create a style that makes Creepy all the more effective. One scene, involving a potential witness being prodded into remembering forgotten details, sucks you in with its clever

staging and finely crafted direction and it's only after the scene ends that you notice what Kurosawa has done and how he has played you.

Unfortunately, the plotting isn't quite as well-handled. Once we head towards the denouement you will question a couple of the choices of the characters and the plot does hinge on a huge coincidence. However, it still builds to a tense and brutal ending.

Creepy earns its title. With an effective and unsettling atmosphere, Creepy is an entertaining and captivating dark thriller with some nice stylistic touches from Kurosawa.

COURTNEY BUTTON

★★★★★★★ 8





WOODY ALLEN: 6 FILMS - 1979 - 1985

BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: WOODY ALLEN / STARRING: WOODY ALLEN, DIANE KEATON, MIA FARROW, JEFF DANIELS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Having made over 50 films, Woody Allen's career has had as many ups and downs as a Coney Island rollercoaster. He's won four Oscars for writing or directing out of an incredible 19 nominations (including for acting) and, at 81, is still going strong. But for every Annie Hall or Midnight in Paris, there's a Curse of the Jade Scorpion or Hollywood Ending to mess with his reputation as a truly great filmmaker.

Concentrating on the period between 1979 and 1985 (following a previous release

looking at 1971-78), a new box set of six films presents a treasure trove cross-section, revealing the light, serious and experimental side of Woody.

It starts with Manhattan. If this was the only film Allen had ever made, he'd still be a bona fide genius. The fact that it came just a few years after his even better Annie Hall is astonishing, and it's a little jarring not to have those films together as companions. Still, by any standards, Manhattan is close to perfect. The story of an unhappy TV writer dating

a much younger girl is astute, deeply moving, hilarious and beautiful. It confirmed Allen, post-Oscar, as a serious artist, and created a massive expectation for his next feature.

Stardust Memories is one of Allen's most personal movies, about a filmmaker attending a retrospective of his work. As he's surrounded by fans and sycophants, memories of past loves and chances lost are evoked. There's no denying the beauty of the film – it's glorious to look at, but it's also one of the most difficult in his career, with what was seen at the time to be a sneering attitude towards the very people who had made Allen such a success. Watching it now, with the benefit of his later work in mind, it's less of a shock, but still not easy to love.

A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy followed, as unexpected as could be. A funny and wistful tale of friends on a weekend retreat in the 1900s countryside, it also didn't fare well with critics, but removed from the weight of expectation it's absolutely delightful, as playful and visually beautiful a film as Allen has ever made.

His next three films contributed to and heralded a

genuinely spectacular period in his career.

Zelig, Broadway Danny Rose, and The Purple Rose of Cairo (Allen's own favourite) are three small masterpieces. The mockumentary that follows the fortunes of Leonard Zelig, a chameleon-like man who takes on the physical appearance of those he's around, becomes a celebrity and infiltrates some major moments in history, is as technically adventurous as it is funny, once more revealing the tremendous ambition of Allen's filmmaking. If Broadway Danny Rose doesn't make you cry with laughter and with pathos, then you're probably not emotionally ready for a Woody Allen box set at all, and then, crowning it all, is The Purple Rose of Cairo.

Above all others in this collection, this film brings out all that is genius about Woody Allen. Its originality, its humour, its performances (he always has such GREAT casts), its ambition, both intellectually and emotionally – it's all there. It's a truly great work, rounding off this essential collection very nicely.

ROBERT MARTIN

★★★★★★★★★★10



STAR TREK: THE RODDENBERRY VAULT

BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: VARIOUS / STARRING: WILLIAM SHATNER, LEONARD NIMOY, DEFOREST KELLEY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Comprising a dozen classic episodes and, more importantly, copious amounts of never-before-seen footage, the Roddenberry Vault will be for many fans – with apologies to Star Trek Beyond – the highlight of the 50th anniversary.

The result of a nearly decade-long collaboration between the Roddenberry family, CBS and Trek gurus Mike and Denise Okuda, the project painstakingly went through every surviving bit of footage from the series. Much

of this was in the form of low-quality dailies made for Gene Roddenberry and kept by his family since his death in 1991.

Now it's been examined, restored and presented here for the first time ever; what little behind the scenes footage of the series we've seen before has been in the form of blooper reels or home movies. What's special about the Roddenberry Vault, however, is that we get actual unused footage from the series.

Chief amongst these are several deleted scenes. Unlike

today, where every second of a series' production is catalogued for posterity, in the '60s it was very different. In many cases, fans didn't know if extra scenes that appeared in novelisations or scripts ever existed. Many of those legendary scenes are here. We won't spoil which ones, as half the joy of the set is discovering for yourself, but expect more from characters such as Khan, Edith Keeler, and possibly Sulu's biggest dialogue scene of the entire series.

There are also a number of alternate takes of existing scenes, as well as altered or omitted dialogue, occasional snippets from before or after scenes, raw effects footage and yes, even the occasional blooper. Much of this is pure gold. It's amazing watching the relaxed, smiling Leonard Nimoy change into Spock as the cameras start rolling, or to hear additional lines from one of Kirk's most famous speeches.

A small note of caution, however: all the footage here is from low-quality prints, not the original negative, so don't expect a pristine restoration. The picture quality isn't always great, there's missing dialogue,

and one famous deleted scene only exists from Spock's reaction shot, with McCoy's lines read off-camera by the script supervisor.

There are approximately 45 minutes of recovered footage here, expanded to nearly three hours through fairly standard making-of material, featuring an impressive collection of interviewees. All the surviving main cast members feature, as do behind the scenes personnel and guest stars including Leslie Parrish and Clint Howard.

Rounding off the set are twelve episodes, including The Corbomite Maneuver, Devil in the Dark, and Return to Tomorrow. There are a few new commentaries and, for the first time, isolated music tracks. If you're not overly familiar with the Original Series, the episodes here are amongst the finest.

For most, though, it's the newly discovered footage that's the main selling point. We've been kept waiting half a century for it, and for many, this is the Holy Grail.

IAIN ROBERTSON

★★★★★★★★★★9



THE LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN'S APOCALYPSE
DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: STEVE BENDELACK / SCREENPLAY: JEREMY DYSON, MARK GATISS, STEVE PEMBERTON, REECE SHEARSMITH / STARRING: MARK GATISS, STEVE PEMBERTON, REECE SHEARSMITH, DAVID WARNER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Having used what would probably have been their preferred portmanteau idea for the 2000 Christmas Special, The League of Gentlemen needed something a little different for their feature film in 2005. The show had been a series of sketches pastiching horror tropes, loosely combining into vague narratives in the televised version, and for The League of Gentlemen's Apocalypse the three comedians and Jeremy Dyson (played here by Michael Sheen) went metatextual, asking

what the characters themselves might think of the writers abandoning them. Art reflecting life, reflecting art again.

The League's more enduring creations probably wouldn't sustain an ongoing narrative themselves, working better in a progressing sketch of the week scenario, so Papa Lazarou, Edward, and Tubbs are dispensed with early on and the second string likes of the rough-talking Geoff and Hilary Briss the butcher, along with Herr Lipp are given centre stage. The upside is

that this gives Messers Gatiss, Pemberton and Shearsmith an opportunity to flesh out and humanise the creations they feel best capable of, the downside being that this no longer really feels like The League of Gentlemen at all. And the biggest issue is that you absolutely need an acquaintance with the programme to understand what's happening, but because you're not getting what you paid for you won't care.

The story involves the writers' abandonment of the project bringing an Apocalypse to Royston Vasey that Geoff, Bris, and Lipp must prevent or perish, stumbling through a crack in reality in an attempt to track down Gatiss, Pemberton, and Shearsmith, and finding themselves in the Real World. Geoff writes himself into the plot of the League's new fiction, allowing David Warner's Dr Erasmus Pea to cross back over into Vasey, and Herr Lipp accidentally ends up living Steve Pemberton's life with wife Emily Woof. The increased budget allows for a couple of Harryhausen-esque stop motion monsters, and there are cameos galore from the likes of Peter Kay, Victoria Wood, and Simon Pegg.

While Reece Shearsmith as Geoff carries the protagonistic elements of the plot, in doing so proving a much better actor than the TV series gave him the opportunity to be, it is Steve Pemberton living Herr Lipp's double life who gives the picture its heart. Pemberton is the most capable of the on-screen League members, and by the film's end you do find yourself caring far more about "the worst pun in the world" than you'd ever imagine you could.

The League of Gentlemen's Apocalypse finishes with a lovely reversal of fortune, and it is, as long as you know what you're getting, a tremendously entertaining and mostly very funny film. But it's also very dense and self-reflexive, and difficult to actually love.

Extras: Audio commentary / The Making of The League of Gentlemen's Apocalypse / The Real Royston Vasey / A Cast of Thousands / A Gentleman's Diary by Steve Pemberton / Deleted scenes / Out-takes / Gallery / Trailers

JR SOUTHALL

★★★★★★★7



MORE AMERICAN GRAFFITI (1979)
DVD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: B.L. NORTON / STARRING: PAUL LE MAT, CINDY WILLIAMS, CANDY CLARK, CHARLES MARTIN SMITH, MACKENZIE PHILLIPS, BO HOPKINS, RON HOWARD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

American Graffiti was one of the most profitable films ever made, so it's unsurprising that six years later a sequel was produced. What is surprising is that the sequel manages to maintain the tone and themes of the original, while moving the story forward via an innovative approach that makes More American Graffiti worthwhile – if not wholly successful – in its own right.

Set across four consecutive New Year's Eves, we concentrate

in turn on each of four returning characters from the first film, although they share only one scene together at the start. The four stories barely impact upon one another, rather than showing them successively, they are instead intercut sequentially with short visits to each of the characters' developing tales. Each of the four uses an appropriately differing filmmaking technique; 4:3 for Vietnam, Woodstock-style split

screens throughout the 1966 sequences, and so on.

The 1964 segment, two years after the original, sees John Milner (Le Mat) – still drag racing and hoping unsuccessfully to turn professional – involved in a problematic love story that mirrors his experience in the first film. A year on, and Terry 'the Toad' Fields (Smith) has been several months in Vietnam and will do anything to get out. In the 1966 sequences, Debbie Dunham (Clark) falls in with a counter-culture rock band in an attempt to get her wayward boyfriend a position as their guitarist, while finally in 1967 Laurie Henderson (Williams) leaves her husband Steve (Howard, returning for basically an extended cameo) after an argument over whether she should be allowed to get a job, and ends up getting accidentally involved in a student protest.

Harrison Ford and Mackenzie Phillips (Milner's 'love interest' Carol from the original) each return for a single scene in which we discover how their characters have moved on, and Bo Hopkins returns as

the leader of the Pharaohs, now in Vietnam and sharing a mindset with the Toad. The characters have developed and matured into young adulthood, but are still beset by the same preoccupations and flaws that they earlier exhibited. It's an intelligent development, albeit one that sorely misses the presence of Richard Dreyfuss' Curt Henderson, although the voice of Wolfman Jack is still all across the soundtrack – which is, as expected, filled with wall-to-wall classic songs from the era.

Fans of American Graffiti will not be as disappointed by the sequel as George Lucas reportedly was (albeit largely because of the modest box office, it seems), as the approach is familiar and assured and the follow-up certainly feels of a piece with its precursor. But a slightly cleverer script might have made of it something as special as the original, and it isn't quite that.

JR SOUTHALL

★★★★★★★7



iZOMBIE SEASON 1

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: ROSE MCIVER, MALCOLM GOODWIN, RAHUL KOHLI, ROBERT BUCKLEY, DAVID ANDERS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

For the past few years, DC Comics and The CW have become the major heavyweights when it comes to comic book adapted television shows with Arrow (particularly the first two seasons), The Flash, Supergirl, and Legends of Tomorrow. But that doesn't mean every single corner of The CW/DC Comics world is full of superheroes and costumed vigilantes... How about crime investigations involving zombies? Well, iZombie, inspired by the Vertigo comic book series by Chris Roberson and Michael Allred, is the show for you as creator Rob Thomas delivers yet another television

standout that's the perfect combination of Veronica Mars (Thomas' previous creation) and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Like Veronica Mars, this deals with a young heroine who solves crimes and mysteries, and like Buffy, she has her own 'Scooby Gang', supernatural powers, and a true love she's forced to remain separate from. Like both shows, this is brimmed with snappy dialogue, inside jokes, and pop culture references, yet because of how strong and multi-layered is, iZombie stands on its own as its own separate entity.

For a first season, it's damn

impressive how the stakes keep raising after each episode, each individual storyline developing and changing along the way. When things start out initially, you think you have a good idea what the tone is, who the characters are and where they are at, and where things could possibly lead. However, during the course of the series, the rug keeps getting pulled out from under you as the major story threads loom in, and that's when things start to change. True, this show does follow a 'case-of-the-week' formula, yet this works perfectly with what's going on within the show. As each new incident rolls in, the characters are developed extensively, relationships are delved into more, and the stories on their own are given time to breathe. Sometimes the cases are one-offs, whilst some are tied into the main storyline, which feels like a natural progression as each character starts to tread new uncharted waters.

With this kind of material, each and every actor involved has to be up to the challenge, and the standout who truly brings her A-game is Rose McIver, definitely the real beating heart and soul of this show. McIver brought out the nuances, the snarkiness and the pathos that drives Liv as a character, and as she digests

each brain along with its own unique personality, this brilliantly allows McIver to show real versatility as an actor. The rest of the cast plays off well together, too, with Rahul Kohli bringing genuine comedy relief as bumbling scientist Ravi, Malcolm Goodwin delivering deadpan charm as no-nonsense Det. Clive Babineaux, and David Anders bringing pure, delicious evil as big bad Blaine. Robert Buckley is a real surprise; we see different sides to his acting abilities as the character of Major Lilywhite goes to some dark places.

Whenever a TV show initially starts, it often fails to be smooth or intricately written at first before things eventually get better. However, this is not the case as iZombie has an incredibly strong and consistent first season. The light-hearted tone is a welcome relief, the performances are top notch (especially McIver), the writing strong, the threat gets bigger and better, and when it delivers emotionally, it certainly delivers. Even though it's based on an unlikely and surprising source, the result is nothing more inimitably clever entertainment from start to finish.

RYAN POLLARD

★★★★★★★★★ 9



STAN LEE'S LUCKY MAN

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: JAMES NESBITT, EVE BEST, OMID DJALILI, AMARA KARAN, STEPHEN HAGAN, SIENNA GUILLORY / RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 6TH

British drama has form for telling stories about people with superpowers without breaking the budget. Sky One's latest contribution, called Stan Lee's Lucky Man, is a case in point. James Nesbitt plays

Detective Harry Clayton, a hard-

boiled London based police detective with a failing marriage and a gambling problem. After one particularly epic bender, he wakes up next to a mysterious lady who has attached a magical bracelet on his wrist. This piece of occult jewellery apparently

grants the wearer the power of incredible luck, though karma will always seek a balance. Of course, this is mostly done through extended coincidence rather than too many special effects, which is not only neat, but also clever.

As you may be able to tell from the title, the premise for the show came from comic book legend Stan Lee, but don't get too excited, this isn't a Marvel-esque show. It's basically a British cop drama with the special twiddle being that Clayton can pull off some of the most amazing stunts and feats of coincidence. The cast is excellent; Eve Best is the ex-wife, Omid Djalili the shady underworld contact and Amara Karan as his cleverer and more competent partner DS Chohan. The other star of this show is the city of London itself, which is shot in a loving yet gritty style throughout the series.

The arc plot is the usual convoluted cop show nonsense. Harry's gambling debts have

placed him under suspicion from friends and allies, and as the story unfolds, Harry clearly becomes the super-cop that no one trusts, with both criminal and legal conspiracies arrayed against him. Nesbitt is superb throughout, though he does come close to chewing the scenery on occasion.

Stan Lee's Lucky Man is pretty much what we expect from a creative team that includes Stan Lee - glossy, silly and with plenty of over-wrought and over-done clichés that somehow still seem to work. Season One is stretched a little thin in places, which makes it sag a little in the middle, but the scenes that involve the incredible coincidences that Harry's luck power evokes really work and really sell the drama. A superior sort of cop show for fans of genre weirdness.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★ 8



BRUCE LEE: THE MASTER COLLECTION

BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: BRUCE LEE, JOHN SAXON, JIM KELLY, COLLEEN CAMP, MARIA YI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It's the early 2000s. Picture the trailer:

"MIRAMAX FILMS PRESENT THE NEW FILM BY QUENTIN TARANTINO. WHEN YOU ARE LOOKING TO PAY A DEBT, PUT IT ON THE 'BILL'. THURMAN – LEE – CARRADINE – KILL BILL"

One can only imagine, but millions of fans would certainly have been chomping at the bit to see that film – if all had agreed to appear in it. Considering Thurman's attire mirroring Lee's in *Game of Death*, it would have been an apt homage. Another possible motivation would have been Lee agreeing to get one back on David Carradine, who beat Lee to the lead in the TV series *Kung Fu*.

One can also only speculate on what might have been if legendary martial artist Bruce Lee had lasted beyond his tragic death in July 1973. However, given his maverick mindset and desire to further the Martial Arts and spiritual message, we sense that Bruce Lee would have gone his own way and created a new genre of filmmaking and higher level of success that would have even transcended his achievements up to and including *Enter the Dragon*.

Bruce Lee: The Master Collection is the consummate collection of films and documentaries that long-term fans will have no trouble snapping up. There are three

documentaries here: *The Curse of the Dragon* (1993), *Bruce Lee – The Man and the Legend* (1973) and *Bruce Lee – The Legend* (1984). The latter two are variations of the same documentary and contain vintage archive footage including Lee's funeral, early films and his first Hollywood screen test. These are contained on the sixth disc (which is a DVD, not Blu-ray) disc.

Of the five completed films in the collection, which are all in HD and uncut (with the chain-sticks scenes all included throughout), *The Big Boss* (1971), *Fist of Fury* (1972), and *The Way of the Dragon* (1972) are best viewed in their original language with English subtitle versions. Enter the *Dragon* (1973) and *Game of Death* (partly shot and filmed by Lee in 1972, but completed with doubles and re-edits by director Robert Clouse in 1978) were shot specifically for the English market.

So, what of the films themselves four decades on? It is safe to say that Lee was one of the first true superstar brands of contemporary cinema and remains a departed talent with considerable crossover appeal to the masses. The same energy and vibrancy that greeted audiences on their original releases is encompassed in its full glory. The remastering

of the quintet of offerings in their full versions maintains the celluloid look (digital remastering tends to create a crisper, cleaner look at times when removing the original grain of the image in 35mm).

The plots of the films are very simple – humble man returns to visit his family, gauntlets and challenges are thrown down, thus providing an outlet so Lee can demonstrate his phenomenal feats of strength and skill. Enter the *Dragon* remains the suitable starting point for anyone unfamiliar with Lee's legacy, but you can watch them in order from *The Big Boss* and appreciate how Lee evolved as a screen presence. Like Clint Eastwood, he was an expert in the art of doing less at times, but that would only heighten what he could do if prompted.

Story is secondary here and happily the films provide more than a fair share of action and thrills to the core group they are aimed at. Bruce Lee: The Master Collection is an excellent opportunity to witness what is still only a fraction of what a true world legend could achieve in his lifetime.

JOHN HIGGINS

★★★★★★★★★★10



HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE

DVD + BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: TAIKA WAITITI / STARRING: SAM NEILL, JULIAN DENNISON, RACHEL HOUSE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Amidst the abundance of comic book movies, nestled behind earnest Oscar-baiting fare, there lies a small niche reserved for films that very quietly, in their own way, are brilliant. Commonly small, independent productions, these films arrive without pomp, ceremony or expectation, and often rise straight to the top of annual Top 10 lists as their popularity spreads largely through word of mouth. *Hunt For The Wilderpeople* is one such film.

Ironically, writer and director Taika Waititi's next project will be the completion of a certain Norse God's trilogy, but if he can balance his delicate, infectious humour with the needs of a mega-budget blockbuster then *Thor: Ragnarok* could well be the best Marvel movie yet.

The premise behind *Wilderpeople* is initially familiar, and latterly bizarrely original. Troubled kid goes to live with his caring "Auntie" and objectional "Uncle". When the matriarch

dies, kid and uncle must find some middle ground, and a tight bond is eventually formed when they embark upon an accidental adventure that leads to them having to evade a national manhunt. The brilliance in *Wilderpeople* lies in the effortless way Waititi handles his subject matter. Nothing ever feels contrived or forced as the tone switches from subtle humour you may miss first time round, to dark echoes of reality that ground the melodrama. Through crafted scenes of normality that feel more like ad-libbed sketches, to ingenious moments of surreal surprise, this is a film always perfectly balanced, with the audience being part of the drama rather than simply watching it from the comfort of a sofa.

You react to the characters as if part of your own family; tutting and sighing when obstinate or ignorant, and smiling with pride when they do or say just the right thing at just the right time.

Much of this inherent

warmth comes from the performances, which are flawless without exception. Whether it is Sam Neill as the crotchety Uncle Hec, Rima Te Wiata as the fateful Bella or Julian Dennison as young anti-hero Ricky, there is naturalty to the characters you rarely see.

Witty, warming and wonderful, *Hunt For The Wilderpeople* is a film that, should you have even an ounce of sentiment or feeling, will charm you from the opening moments to the enjoyably predictable finale. This film is the best chocolate you've ever tasted with a delicate kick of chilli, a fine red wine that may carry a hint of hangover – it is one unashamedly sentimental for all the right reasons, and one that carries a subtle touch of reality. Watch it as soon as possible; we guarantee you'll not be disappointed.

JOHN TOWNSEND

★★★★★★★★★★9



THE PURGE: ELECTION YEAR

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JAMES DEMONACO / STARRING: FRANK GRILLO, ELIZABETH MITCHELL, MYKELTI WILLIAMSON, JOSEPH JULIAN SORIA, BETTY GABRIEL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

James DeMonaco expands his Purge franchise to a trilogy with the timely *The Purge: Election Year*. Every year in the US, for one twelve-hour period, all crime is legal. This is called the Purge. Senator Charlie Roan (Elizabeth Mitchell) had her family murdered during a Purge and now runs for presidency to try to stop the national holiday. The current government want to stop her so they attempt to assassinate her at this year's Purge. However, Leo Barnes (Frank Grillo), who spared his son's killer in *The Purge:*

Anarchy, is now her head of security and is going to put his life on the line to protect the senator.

The Purge series is one of the more high-concept current franchises in mainstream horror. The first film disappointed by not capitalising on this idea and was instead a limp and dull home invasion movie. The Purge: *Anarchy* raised things significantly by being hugely enjoyable with plenty of memorable images and a few interesting ideas thrown in. The Purge: *Election Year* sits somewhere in the middle. It

does show some creativity and invention with a few arresting images that stick in the mind, such as 'Purge' written in blood on the pillars of the Lincoln memorial, a middle-aged woman singing to herself sat on a bench while a corpse burns in front of her, and the killer teenage girls riding around in a lit-up car with Miley Cyrus's Party in the USA blaring. But its bigger ideas are brought from *Anarchy* rather than really creating anything new itself; people prowl the night with guns and creatively decorated masks, and the rich gather up a selection of destitute people to kill for themselves, this time with a religious ceremony involved. Ultimately, *Election Year* is a chase movie as Roan and Barnes are pursued by militant Neo-Nazis, but it's entertaining enough.

The characters are fine. Frank Grillo (Captain America: *The Winter Soldier* and *Civil War*) continues his trajectory as the next big Hollywood action star. Joe Dixon (Mykelti Williamson), Marcos (Joseph Julian Sortia) and Laney Rucker (Betty Garbiel) are the working class element of the film who get to mingle with the rich senator and show that there are good people just trying to get by. They won't stick with

you but you care enough about them to hope they get to hold their own.

Carrying on with the second film's socio-economic message (the Purge is a scheme invented by the rich to kill the working class and migrant community while making themselves more money and allowing them to have a little murderous fun in the process), it really hits the political message hard. *Election Year* was, of course, timed to coincide with last year's US election, but the filmmakers were probably counting their blessings as the Trump frenzy grew out of control. You can imagine Trump sitting at home watching the film and getting a few ideas with a grin on his handful-of-old-ham face.

The Purge: *Election Year* is better than *The Purge* but isn't as good as *The Purge: Anarchy*. It lacks as much invention as the central idea can conjure but it is a largely enjoyable action horror with flashes of creativity to keep things interesting. It's still not as scary as the actual US election, though.

COURTNEY BUTTON

★★★★★★+ 6



BLOOD PUNCH

VOD / DIRECTOR: MADELLAINA PAXSON / SCREENWRITER: EDDIE GUZELIAN / STARRING: MILO CAWTHORNE, OLIVIA TENNET, ARI BOYLAND, ADELAIDE KANE, COHEN HOLLOWAY, FLEUR SAVILLE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Who would've have thought that Flynn, Ziggy and Doctor K from *Power Rangers RPM* would mature so violently?! *Blood Punch* is a dark, twisted, deranged, yet innovative dark comedy with a tad of sci-fi thrown in; never-ending time-loops creep into a never-ending story that's full of misdirections, so when you think it's leading somewhere or if it looks like it's ending, the film pulls the rug out from under you. This takes the

audience on a psychotic journey, and traps us in the same puzzle as our messed-up protagonists where even the easy ways out are not entirely what they seem.

What makes the storytelling in this film work is that, based on the beginning, the audience may think that what we are in for is a somewhat conventional story, but nothing is all as it seems and we are as bewildered as our characters by what transpires later on. As the characters

unravel the mind-mending circumstance surrounding them, the more trapped they become, and we, as an audience, are trapped with them. Husband-and-wife filmmakers Madellaine Paxson (director) and Eddie Guzelian (writer), whose track-records include making direct-to-video sequels for Disney, have both described this twisted fare as something between *Groundhog Day* and *Blood Simple*, which is something of an apt description indeed. Together, they hatch a film that has a unique flair and style to it; one example being the scene where our two demented antiheroes enjoy a torrid fling of passion while becoming drenched in blood raining down upon them.

Having a filmmaking duo whose previous credits include Disney movies might sound like a bizarre fit for this kind of film, but it gets more crazy as three of the main stars from the short-lived *Power Rangers RPM* series are among the main cast, as well as two others in minor cameo roles. Olivia Tennet is the real star of the show, giving off an aura of sheer dynamism with layers of subtlety, which

shows why Tennet is a true force of nature when it comes to performing. Milo Cawthorne is also incredibly solid as the unsure nerd who's struggling to come to terms with bad life decisions and the odds being thrown at him; Cawthorne handles the evolving confusion brilliantly. Plus, Ari Boyland appears to be having a whale of a time as the psychotic boyfriend caught within the twisted love triangle, also the one who bears the brunt of the ultra-violence displayed on screen.

Despite being made on a tight budget, *Blood Punch* is an enjoyably insane, darkly funny, gruesomely warped indie that takes pleasure in messing with the audience's minds. It may not be for everyone's tastes and it is true that it's scrappy around the edges, but its target audience should get a lot of pleasure out of it. It's a dark and bumpy ride with committed performances, particularly in the case of the excellent Olivia Tennet.

RYAN POLLARD

★★★★★★+ 8



THE GUYVER (1991)

BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: SCREAMING MAD GEORGE, STEVE WANG / SCREENPLAY: JON PURDY / STARRING: JACK ARMSTRONG, GREG JOUNG PAIK, JIMMIE WALKER, MICHAEL BERRYMAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Sean (Armstrong) is a young American kid dealing with the usual array of teen problems: does the girl of his dreams, Mizky, like him? Will he ever learn to kick ass in martial arts class? How will he control the ultimate alien bio-suit that has invaded his body? These questions and more sit firmly on the back boiler of this insane love letter to early '90s special effects and latex-covered animatronic hilarity.

Story-wise, there's not

much to chew on. After Sean's true love Mizky (Vivian Wu) discovers that her father has been murdered, the two unwittingly become a part of the evil Kronos Corporation's search for the Guyver – a much-feared alien bio-armour capable of destroying the evil Zoanoids. During a fight with some thugs, Sean essentially trips over and absorbs the sought-after suit, becoming the ultra-cool-looking titular hero

and finally kicking ass in the process. From then on out, it's a cat and mouse chase involving plenty of insanely creative creature designs, cartoonish violence and questionable acting abilities aplenty.

Oh, and Mark Hamill plays a cop.

Originally titled Mutronix in the UK, this first entry in the short-lived Guyver film series is as appallingly terrible as it is blissfully enjoyable. Taking its comedy cues from the then-successful Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles live action movies and its action from the similarly popular Power Rangers TV show, The Guyver tries to please all demographics at once. At the time it failed in its mission, limping its way to VHS and a modest cult following. But while a much better and all-together more fulfilling sequel later emerged, this first outing still stands tall as a testament to ingenuity behind the camera and mind-blowing insanity in front of it.

All of the good stuff that pulsates through The Guyver is down to its ultra-talented joint

directors, special effects gurus Screaming Mad George and Steve Wang. What they lack in directorial ability, they more than make up for in on-screen ingenuity thanks to some superb creature designs and envelope-pushing effects work. Admittedly, in retrospect that's something that's easily overlooked, but the sheer workmanship that went into every one of the incredible Zoanoid creatures, as well as the Guyver suit itself, deserves commendation. There's plenty there for the fanboys too (even if the concept itself does kind of undersell its manga roots) with the inclusion of turns from Michael Berryman, Hamill and the Reanimator two-for David Gale and Jeffrey Combs (as Doctor East – geddit?)

If there's a consummate definition of 'so bad its good' then The Guyver is it.

Extras: Interview with producer Brian Yuzna / US and German Trailers / Photo Gallery.

GRANT KEMPSTER

★★★★★★★ 7



2 JENNIFER

DVD + VOD / CERT: TBC / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: HUNTER JOHNSON / STARS: HUNTER JOHNSON, DAVID COUPE, LARA JEAN MUMMERT, JODY BARTON, JAMES CULLEN BRESSACK / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW (US)

Here's a twist: a film shot on an iPhone about making a sequel to a film shot on an iPhone. James Cullen Bressack's ballys 2013 film was a minor hit (and the first film made completely using the phone), and this very self-aware follow-up manages to not only improve on the original but also up the stakes greatly.

Spencer (writer/director Johnson) is a massive fan of Bressack's film To Jennifer and has secured the rights to make a remake, and has got his friend Mack (Coupe) along as a producer. Spencer assures Mack that Bressack is on board and will be joining them for the auditions, but when he doesn't

show, they go ahead without him. While trying the actors out for the titular role, Spencer becomes increasingly edgy, refusing to even entertain one artist. He's already insisted that they be called Jennifer for authenticity, and since he will be playing the male role himself, Spencer gets intensely involved with the auditions. The Jennifer they choose for the role (Mummert) is keen and, as 'luck' would have it, is also an old friend of one of the stars of the original film. When she and Mack appear to be hitting it off and she also blags the pair an invite to a party Bressack will be attending, the venture begins to

spiral out of control.

As 'meta' films go, 2 Jennifer is king. Opening with a montage of talking heads espousing the virtues of the original (and the odd one taking the more negative slant), we are soon plunged into a fly-on-the-wall world that takes the 'video diary' approach of To Jennifer to the extreme. Spencer is intent on filming every aspect of the film's production on his phone - from meetings to the auditions and beyond. The film itself is meant to be utilising professional cameras, but we never get that far.

As Spencer, the multi-talented Johnson is superb; he's intensely obsessed about the project from the start, a fixation bordering on the unhinged, which unsurprisingly will become clearer as the film goes on. Having some of the original talent from the first film is a masterstroke (much like the self-referential Human Centipede films) and, in particular, Bressack (who doesn't particularly portray himself in a positive light). Although it's all filmed in the same lo-fi manner, there are occasional cutaways and alternate angles as other phone cameras are used, but they are not too distracting; on the

whole, it's well executed and surprisingly engaging.

Where the first film was a road movie video diary, the 'found footage' conceit works much better with the sequel and, dare we say it, actually comes across as believable. We know something's amiss, but until the denouement, we can't quite figure out what. The truth is more shocking than anything we could guess, no matter how much foreshadowing we've had.

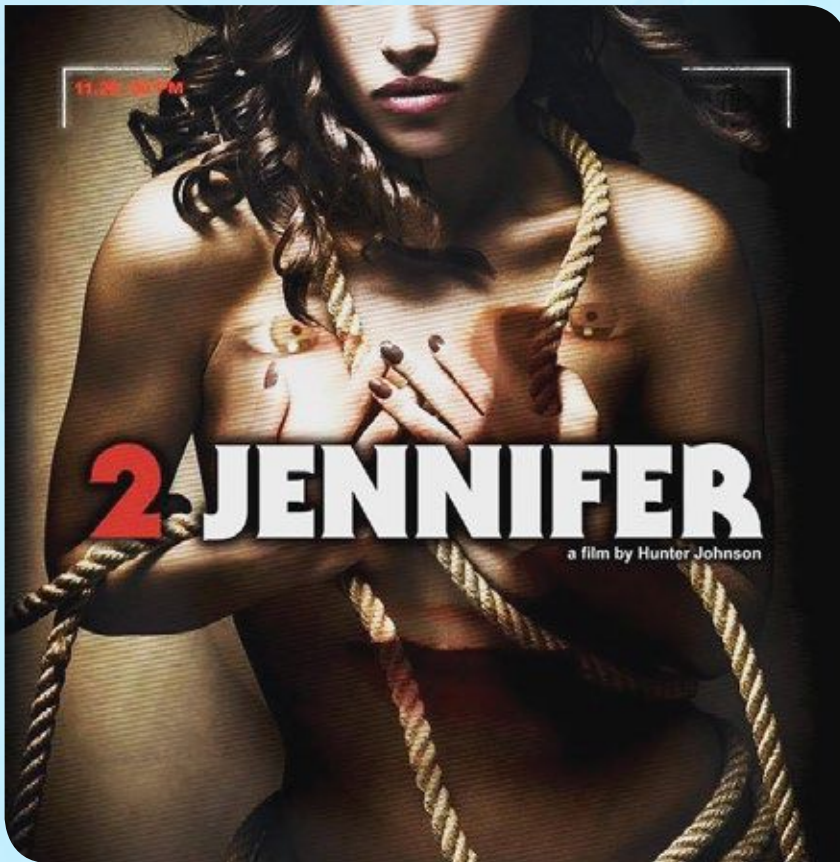
Felissa Rose (Sleepaway Camp) and Erin Marie Hogan (House of Manson) make appearances during the audition sequence, but their familiarity doesn't throw the authenticity, mainly due to the 'behind the scenes of the movie' feel.

It's refreshing to have a sequel work so well and for it actually not be essential that one has seen the original. Ultimately, it's a more enjoyable ride than the first, with a payoff that packs quite a wallop.

Extras: Commentary with Hunter Johnson, James Cullen Bressack, Frank Merle, Lara Jean Mummert / Deleted scenes.

MARTIN UNSWORTH

★★★★★★★ 8



STARBURST catches up with the writer/director of the fantastic meta-sequel 2 JENNIFER...

STARBURST: Why did you decide to make a sequel to James Cullen Bressack's *To Jennifer*?

Hunter Johnson: I've been a fan of James' films for a long time. I reviewed *To Jennifer* for my site, LAHorror.com. I loved it and found it personally inspiring that he shot it on a phone and got it out there. I eventually had the privilege of working with James on a horror film called *Restoration*, and in the process of shooting I pitched him the initial idea for *2 Jennifer*. From a logistical standpoint, shooting my first feature on an iPhone made sense, plus I was excited for where I wanted to take the story.

2 Jennifer takes a very 'meta' approach to filmmaking; did you ever have to dial it back from being too self-aware?

When James and my producing partner Frank Merle initially read the script, they were both very surprised by how meta it was, and I think both of them looked at me with a raised eyebrow in terms of some of the content in the script. That said, I didn't want to be bound by any 'rules' of found footage or meta filmmaking, so I just did whatever I wanted and let it

exist in its own world. Some people play themselves, some people play characters of themselves, and some people simply play characters. It's a movie, take it for what it is and enjoy the ride.

As well as being a slow-burn horror, it can be read as a kind of warning to actors (and producers!) in the industry, was that the intention?

I had no intentions of making a statement about filmmaking or acting in this business, yet I think the film does say something about what happens behind the scenes of film production. It's a very brutal and judgemental business, which is often completely subjective. You may not get a role because you aren't pretty enough. Maybe you're too pretty. Maybe you're too young or old. It's just part of the business. Also, once people have a glimmer of success in their future, they often ignore or avoid major red flags for fear of missing out on an opportunity. I think *2 Jennifer* shows that in its own demented way. And for the record, I ADORE slow-burn horror films - that aspect was 100% intentional.

How difficult was it being the lead actor as well as director?

It was a lot of fun, but that said, I only cast myself as Spencer because his character films most of the movie. I come from an acting background, plus I knew what I wanted the character to have to do in terms of violent content, so it just made sense - I like to tell myself it wasn't a decision based on ego. It was definitely a fun experience and worked for this film, but that being said, in my next couple of films, I won't be playing a lead role.

James plays (we assume) an exaggerated version of himself in the film; whose idea was that?

That was ALL JAMES. Haha! I like to let actors go as crazy as they want then dial it back if necessary. In the script, James' party wasn't a drug den, but on the day of shooting it just turned out that way. James pitched the crazy cokehead idea and who was I to say no?

What's next for you?

The follow up to this film, *#FromJennifer*, is already complete and will be out this year. The film was written and directed by Frank Merle, and I came on to produce. It's fantastic, takes a whole new approach to the series and features a killer cast including Tony Todd, Derek Mears, and Danielle Taddei as the new Jennifer. My second directed feature, a revenge horror film called *Serena Waits*, is already shot and deep in post-production. *Ugly Sweater Party*, a holiday horror comedy I produced and starred in, is also due out in 2017. My third directed feature, *Irrational Fear*, will be shooting this spring. Very excited to see what's next after that.

2 JENNIFER is available on VOD and DVD in the US.

Words: Martin Unsworth



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AUDIOSTATIC

THE LATEST NEWS
FROM THE WORLD OF
AUDIO ADVENTURES
BY TONY JONES



Big Finish

Big Finish has begun adapting classic stories, with Alexander Vlahos announced as **Hamlet** in a version of the Shakespeare play to be released in 2017. There's also a series of **Cicero** starring **Dirk Gently's** Samuel Barnett. It's a pure historical drama, and something of a departure for Big Finish.

Elsewhere in this issue we have a feature on other classics; this time it's H. G. Wells and the plans to release six audios of his greatest science fiction novels.

We also have news of two more releases for the phenomenal **Survivors** range and plenty more to look forward to alongside their **Doctor Who** and **Torchwood** releases.

R4/4 Extra

The most interesting piece of programming from the BBC wasn't a piece of audio drama at all, but a fascinating documentary with the cumbersome title of **Logan's Run and Intergenerational War**. Focusing on the film, it started back in the late 1960s when the original book was published. Not just a chance to remember one of the seminal films of the 1970s, but also a chance to look at how society has adopted many of the ideas of **Logan's Run**. It majors on the disparity between the wealth of the old and the young, and draws a chilling comparison with the modern world of Silicon Valley where everyone who is anyone seems to be under thirty.

Elsewhere on the BBC, several familiar faces have turned to classic tales, with Benedict Cumberbatch reading Kafka and David Tennant starring in the Robert Louis Stevenson story **Terror in the South Seas**. We've also had Neil Gaiman's **Stardust**, and Radio 4 Extra are continuing their run of Paul Magrs stories in **Doctor Who** in the ten-part **Demon Quest**.

BBC Audio Awards

The shortlist for the 2017 BBC Audio Awards has been announced, with nominations for several genre titles. In the Best Online/Non-Broadcast category there are nods for **Alien – Out of the Shadows** (Audible UK), **Baker's End: The King of Cats** (Bafflegab Productions), **Carmilla** (Audible UK), **Doctor Who: Absent Friends**, **Doctor Who: Death and the Queen**, and **Torchwood: More Than This** (all Big Finish Productions). Mark Gatiss' **Unmade Movies**:

Hitchcock's The Blind Man by Alfred Hitchcock & Ernest Lehman is in the running for Best Adaptation.

The winners will be announced at a ceremony in London on January 29th.

Audio Verse Awards

We've already reported on the Audio Verse Awards, but just a quick note to say the process has now produced a list of finalists (audioverseawards.net/site/list-of-finalists). It took two weeks of counting to process a massive 6,240 votes, and there are still many finalists across the vast range of categories.

BIG FINISH WE LOVE STORIES

Key titles to watch out for this month from Big Finish...

DOCTOR WHO: THE DIARY OF RIVER SONG SERIES 2

The Doctor's time travelling archaeologist/adventurer/wife returns with four more tales that bring her in the path of both the Sixth and Seventh Doctors. Alex Kingston's character's second set of tales takes in planetary anomalies, great storms and the impending destruction of the Earth's solar system.

AVAILABLE JANUARY 30th

+++

DOCTOR WHO SHORT TRIPS: 7.01

THE WORLD BEYOND THE TREES

Nicola Walker narrates this month's tale (directed by Lisa Bowerman), in which MedTech Chenka becomes detached from the Doctor and stranded. Set during the Eighth Doctor period, this promises to be yet another great tale.

AVAILABLE JANUARY 30th

+++

DOCTOR WHO: 221 THE STAR MEN

Peter Davison's Sixth Doctor and companions Adric (Matthew Waterhouse), Nyssa (Sarah Sutton), and Tegan (Janet Fielding) attempt to help find out what happened to the crew of a ship that met with disaster while travelling through the Large Magellanic Cloud.

AVAILABLE JANUARY 30th

+++

THE AVENGERS - STEED AND KEEL:

THE LOST EPISODES VOLUME 7

Three more recreations of lost episodes of the classic TV series starring Julian Wadham and Anthony Howell as Steed and Keel, respectively. The missing stories this time are **Dragonsfield**, **The Far Distant Dead**, and **The Deadly Air**.

AVAILABLE JANUARY 30th

+++

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The latest four adventures for Abby and her sister Zara, two synthetic humans who were created by pan-dimensional beings the Grace to help save space and time.

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REVIEWS

THE LATEST AUDIO
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



TORCHWOOD: OUTBREAK

WRITERS: GUY ADAMS, EMMA REEVES, AK BENEDICT / **DIRECTOR:** SCOTT HANDCOCK / **PUBLISHER:** BIG FINISH / **STARRING:** JOHN BARROWMAN, GARETH DAVID-LLOYD, EVE MYLES, KAI OWEN, TOM PRICE / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW FROM BIG FINISH; GENERAL RELEASE JANUARY 31ST

When a long-dormant, mind-reading, character-changing virus is re-released in 2009, Cardiff finds itself in the grip of an unstoppable contagion. As victims of the 'Good Thinking Programme' lose inhibitions, become animated and crazed, and resort to violence, authorities move to quarantine the city. Scattered and separated, the Torchwood team struggle to respond to the outbreak, come into conflict with the government, and find their efforts challenged by a maverick predecessor from the 1950s.

This full-cast Torchwood adventure revels in a sense of epic scale and the blending of separate, parallel storylines. The three episodes track key stages in the development of the threat soon to engulf the city (and then the world beyond it): 'Incubation' (the development of the infection), 'Prodromal' (the first phase of symptoms), and 'Invasion' (the full onslaught of the disease). The episode names do signpost the key milestones in the trilogy's storyline, but that's not where the real surprises here are to be found.

Torchwood: Outbreak delivers a complex, energetic and multi-strand drama in which the momentum rarely dips. But alongside the high-concept sci-fi ideas and the driving storyline, the scripts find an impressive amount of time to explore some relationship dynamics too, with the

entanglement of Jack and Ianto (file under 'it's complicated') first amongst them. Scott Handcock's direction ensures a keen sense of focus and shows real confidence when handling the switches between time and place and character. Rather than 'announce' the changes through overly obvious dialogue cues, he and the writers allow the listener to recognise each new setting as the next scene unfolds; a far more satisfying audio experience.

This latest story reunites a host of characters from the original TV series: Captain Jack Harkness (John Barrowman) and Ianto Jones (Gareth David-Lloyd) are joined by Gwen Cooper (Eve Myles), Rhys Williams (Kai Owen) and PC Andy Davidson (Tom Price), with all members of the Torchwood 3 ensemble afforded a satisfying amount of attention across the course of the three-hour running time. Amongst the trilogy's guest cast, Samuel Barnett is particularly impressive as the infuriating, officious and mercurial 'Torchwood Assessor' Norton Folgate (first introduced in James Goss' 'Ghost Mission'); while Marilyn Le Conte finds the right mixture of the callous and the supercilious in her portrayal as the deceitful head of the 'outbreak management team' Frances Godalming.

The Torchwood team are put through the wringer in Outbreak. Mortified at the risk he might pose, Jack isolates himself

in a lockup in the Hub, fearful that, as one of the infected, he may harm those that he loves. A tortured Jack is overwhelmed by terrifying recollections of the last time the 'Good Thinking' experiment went wrong and soldiers in his group were burnt to death. As Ianto attempts to manage Jack's containment and find the source of the outbreak, he is all the while harassed by Folgate's incessant, sarcastic commentary. As the body count rises, Gwen finds herself adrift amid a city falling apart, before she too succumbs to the illness. Andy does his best to support the emergency teams responding to the crisis before the resources of the police are overwhelmed and the force itself succumbs to the condition. Rhys, meanwhile, tries to trick and charm his way through the cordon sealing off Cardiff, but begins to question his efforts when he is reunited with a now-unhinged Gwen. As the team uncover the truth and unmask the perpetrators, Gwen reveals some impressive talents as a rabble rouser.

There are some familiar Torchwood tropes in evidence here: the city of Cardiff falls victim to some kind of 'alien' infestation, Torchwood comes under covert scrutiny by the authorities, a crucial artefact is unearthed in the Hub's archives, and untold secrets from Jack's past are revealed. Yet the inclusion of these recognisable beats does not detract in any way from the richly rendered, rip-roaring entertainment on offer in Outbreak, which strikes many original tones of its own. The scripts are punctuated with trademark Torchwood knowing double entendres (which characters comment on directly) and sexual references (particularly around Jack's desirability and prowess). This reinforces that tonal blend of the super-serious and the sassily suggestive that is immediately recognisable as Torchwood.

The release comes with a bonus disc of extra features, in which original show creator Russell T Davies, along with members of cast and crew, reminisces about the making of the TV series (enjoying many good-natured jokes at each other's expense), while the Big Finish Torchwood team discuss the pleasures and perils of bringing the show back into the audio realm. It's a great way to round off an already convincing release. Few Torchwood fans will be immune to the irresistible infection of Outbreak.

RICH CROSS

★★★★★★★ 8



DAN DARE: VOLUME 1

DIRECTOR & PRODUCER: ANDREW MARK SEWELL / **AUTHOR:** RICHARD KURTI, BEV DOYLE, JAMES SWALLOW, MARC PLATT / **STARRING:** ED STOPPARD, GEOFF MCGIVERN, HEIDA REED, MICHAEL COCHRANE, RAAD RAWI / **PUBLISHER:** B7 MEDIA, BIG FINISH / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future is back on audio with a set of stories produced by B7 Media and released by Big Finish. The project is the brainchild of director Andrew Mark Sewell and stars Ed Stoppard (The Pianist) as Dan Dare, Geoff McGivern (The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy) as Digby, the older soldier/companion, and Heida Reed (Poldark) as Professor Peabody. Dan Dare's evil alien enemy is played by Raad

Rawi (Spy).

The set consists of three stories and a disc of the music used. Keeping to the original 1950s comics, the stories are Voyage to Venus, The Red Moon Mystery, and Marooned on Mercury. While the stories keep many core elements of the originals, they are brought up to date and the setting feels modern without compromising on the use of short episodes to recapture the

pace of the comic strips. Ed Stoppard's Dan Dare is driven by a backstory and mixes chisel-jawed hero with the softer skills of a leader with a strong moral compass. He isn't infallible but is unyielding in his desire to do the right thing. Geoff McGivern's Digby has some dry-humored dialogue, adding subtlety to his seemingly straightforward character. There is a sense of much more to come in future episodes. Most interesting of all is Heida Reed's Professor Peabody. The production eschews the stereotypical love interest/scientist-in-glasses tropes of the period (e.g. This Island Earth) and paints a character driven by both science and commercial imperatives, and here we tap into the most modern of features: corporate control of space.

There are plenty of aliens and the largest of all is the Mekon played with pure unemotional evil by Raad Rawi. This rounds off a great collection of stories and by the end of the set, April's release of the second volume seems a long way away. The cast makes their characters live from the first scenes and the music rounds off a sterling production.

Overall, Dan Dare Volume 1 does a good job of recapturing an older style of storytelling while bringing the content up to date. The first chapter of the first story, Voyage to Venus, is also available for free if you've still to make up your mind.

TONY JONES

★★★★★★★★★ 8



DARK SHADOWS: HAUNTING MEMORIES

AUTHOR: MARCY ROBIN, LARA PARKER, ADAM USDEN, KAY STONHAM / **DIRECTOR:** DARREN GROSS / **STARRING:** JERRY LACY, KATHRYN LEIGH SCOTT, LARA PARKER, MARIE WALLACE / **PUBLISHER:** BIG FINISH / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

When Dark Shadows, which began 50 years ago in 1966, was failing in its first year and creator Dan Curtis decided to go full tilt with the supernatural themes he had been flirting with, he didn't know how much of a success it would become.

He almost certainly had no expectation that this choice would lead to a mini-industry all centred on the fictional town of Collinsport and its inhabitants. While resurrections on screen have struggled (most recently Tim Burton's woefully misguided film), Dark Shadows has thrived in other areas.

Haunting Memories is part of the Big Finish special series that have brought back the stars of the much-loved original to continue the tales of the characters. Here, it's four audio pieces that fit in at various points of the series' twisting timelines.

Kicking off with Hell Wind by Marcy Robin, read by Kathryn Leigh Scott, it finds the young Josette Du Pres and her nanny hiding from a violent hurricane on the island of Martinique. In the shelter, Josette will meet the young Angelique for the first time. But tragedy follows the hurricane for the young Du Pres.

Communion by Adam Usden follows preacher Elias Trask and his son Gregory during the civil war in America. On the run from men hunting for them, Trask must make fateful dark deals to survive. The Ghost Ship (by series star Lara Parker) focuses on Angelique, the witch-turned-vampire made to serve the warlock Nicholas Blair and still struggling with her obsessional love for Barnabas Collins.

Finally, A Face From the Past by Kay Stonham puts Elizabeth Collins Stoddard centre stage as she returns to Collinsport and encounters a lost love from her past.

By this stage, Big Finish know Dark Shadows extremely well. Musical cues (which replicate the structure of episodes), the embellishing sound effects and pacing are spot on. The likes of Kathryn Leigh Scott, Jerry Lacy, Lara Parker, and Marie Wallace are actors who, in some cases, have spent most of their professional lives inhabiting this world and it shows. Scott brings breathy, moving empathy to her reading as one of the worst days in Josette's mortal life plays out. Lacy always embodied that fire and brimstone element needed for each deluded Trask and his reading feels more like sermon or prayer as a result.

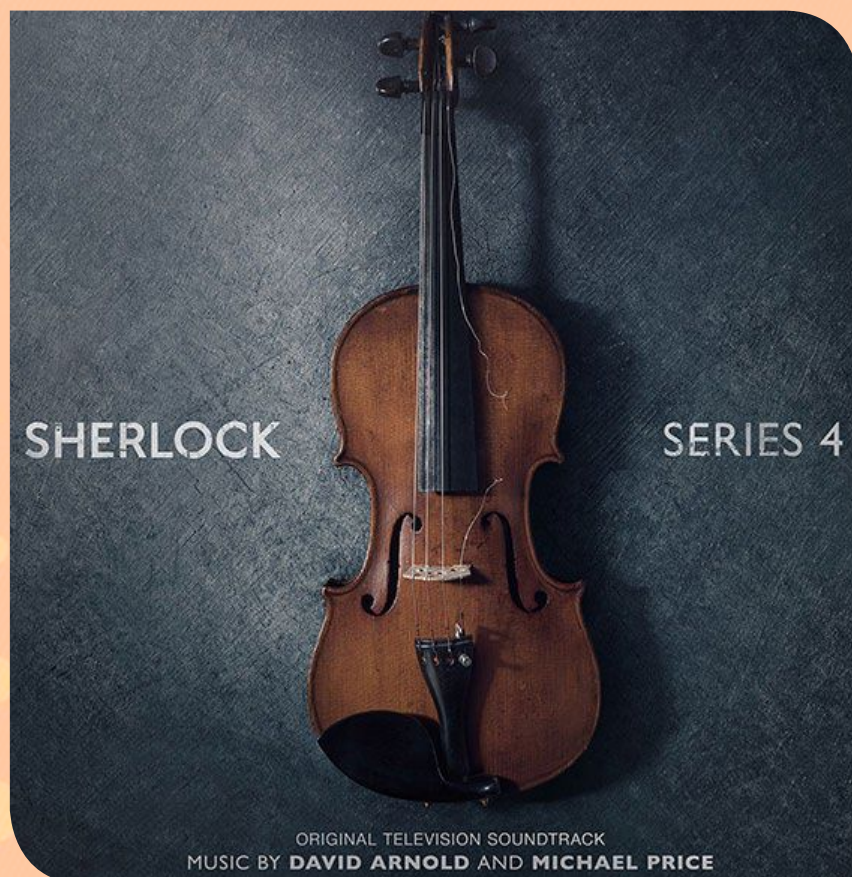
Parker knows Angelique inside and out and as ever, this close connection with her character brings you quickly into the story. Wallace is a fine conduit for giving us another layer to the Collins matriarch Elizabeth. Each story is well written and packs vivid drama into the running time. Familiar in the best way, for fans it's very much recommended.

JAMES EVANS

★★★★★★★★★ 8

OST

THE STARBURST
GUIDE TO THE LATEST
SOUNDTRACKS
BY NICK SPACEK



If you're like us, you spent New Year's Day sitting around the house, holding your head, and wondering what you thought you were doing the night before. After a proper breakfast, nap, and maybe a lengthy shower wherein you considered your poor decision-making skills, you then turned to the real reason for celebrating the arrival of 2017: the fourth season début of **Sherlock**. You heard the opening tones, and were excited and thrilled and, if you're like us, thought, 'What of the score?'

If you pre-ordered the Silva Screen Records release (if not, hurry quickly to sherlock.tmstor.es, because you've only until January 26th), you got both discs, featuring David Arnold and Michael Price's music from all three episodes - *The Six Thatchers*, *The Lying Detective*, and *The Final Problem* - but also a bonus disc, with the music from last year's special, *The Abominable Bride*. That disc is only available with the pre-order, so we do suggest fans of the Arnold and Price music get on that post-haste, especially if you want that lovely vintage take on the

theme, which would be worth buying on its very own.

Yoko Shimomura's score for the long-awaited **Final Fantasy XV** is now available from Square Enix. Available as both Hi-Def Blu-ray audio and standard compact disc, the music from the **Kingdom Hearts** composer has been highly praised, despite being pretty pricey - although that's pretty unsurprising, given that the CD version is a four-disc set. There was also a limited edition version of the Blu-ray, with bonus tracks, such as the theme song *Stand By Me* by Florence + The Machine, as well as what might be the Holy Grail for FF fans. In the game, there's a car called the Regalia, which has a CD player that allows players of the game to listen to music from all across the FF universe. All that music - over 250 tracks! - is on one bonus disc. In addition, the limited edition features an expanded booklet and bonus disc of piano arrangements of some tracks.

Walt Disney Records announced the impending vinyl release of Michael Giacchino's **Rogue One: A Star Wars Story**

score, which will come out at the very end of March. Given the fact that the score was composed right up to the wire, a bit of a delay was to be expected. It's a double LP, and the cover looks gorgeous.

In related news, when the original track listing was announced, many thought that the composer's long-running tradition of terrible puns for track titles had ended (our personal fave being **Dawn of the Planet of the Apes'** *Monkey See, Monkey Coup*). Happily, a list of alternate titles was supplied inside the compact disc's booklet, meaning you can go through iTunes and re-label the boring likes of *Wobani Imperial Labor Camp* with the far-more delightful *Jyncarcerated*.

La-La Land Records' first release of 2017 is yet another addition to their long-running Expanded Archival Collection. It's a slightly belated twentieth anniversary edition of the **Twister** score by Mark Mancina. The original release was fairly noteworthy for having some issues with the channels being switched, in addition to being a mixed score, wherein it was set up to flow like an album, rather than separated cues. All the cues are separated on this new instalment, along with a full 13 minutes of additional music, as well as liner notes that feature new interviews with composer Mancina and director Jan de Bont. It's a limited edition compact disc, with 3000 copies.

In conjunction with Lakeshore Records, Death Waltz Records is releasing an expanded edition of the **Hellraiser** score by composer Christopher Young. The film turns 30 next year; you may have seen the recent Blu-ray franchise box set from Arrow Video, and if you haven't, for shame! - and the expanded edition will be taken directly from the master tapes and supervised by the composer. No further details, but given the folks involved, expect nothing more than a deluxe package that will sound fantastic.

Lakeshore's also teaming up with Invidia to release vinyl editions of the score to two episodes of the most recent season of **Black Mirror**. Sometime in the next few months you will see LP versions of the scores to *San Junipero* by Clint Mansell and *Men Against Fire* by Geoff Barrow and Ben Salisbury. They're both absolutely superb, although we cannot stop listening to Mansell's score, as it's just so gorgeous. Here's hoping someone figures out the licensing rights for all the '80s music for *San Junipero*, and puts out the best mixtape we've ever seen, as well (although you can stream it all via Spotify).

Lakeshore released the Michael Wandmacher score for **Underworld: Blood Wars**, the fifth instalment in the



long-running vampires vs. werewolves franchise. Wandmacher takes over the reins from Paul Haslinger, who'd scored the last two movies, *Rise of the Lycans* and *Awakening*, as well as the original 2003 film, with a score that blends electronic music and orchestral arrangements. Given that the accompanying soundtracks have always been big grab-bags of the latest in metal and EDM, it's surprising we've not yet heard anything regarding that release, but more will hopefully be known before the film releases in mid-February.

Haslinger's latest work is the score for the forthcoming *Resident Evil: The Final Chapter*, which is - obviously - the sixth and final instalment in the long-running science fiction/action/horror franchise. Haslinger takes over the franchise for its conclusion from duo tomandandy, although Jeff Danna and Marco Beltrami have also scored the series at various points. Funnily enough, Beltrami scored an *Underworld* film, as well - 2006's *Evolution*. Haslinger's score, which has an orchestral-meets-industrial sound, is due out at month's end from Milan, who will release the album on compact disc and vinyl.

Out next month from Milan is the latest epic score by *Westworld* and *Game of Thrones* composer Ramin Djawadi: Zhang Yimou's *The Great Wall*, an action-adventure film that sees an army battling monstrous hordes from atop the iconic Chinese structure during the Song dynasty. Given Djawadi's ability create pan-cultural music for fantastic, monster-filled worlds in the



likes of *Game of Thrones* and *Pacific Rim*, and the one taste we've gotten, *Nameless Order*, we're really excited for the rest of the music, said to be filled with 'rumbling drums' and traditional Chinese chanting. The score will be available digitally next month, and on vinyl in March.

With the conclusion of *Penny Dreadful* in June, it only made sense that the final two seasons' Abel Korzeniowski scores would see release at some point. The concluding season saw home video release in October, and the complete series gets a deluxe release next month, so last month brought a double compact disc from Varèse Sarabande. The music - as anyone who binged the series over the holidays knows - is beautiful and eerie, and the show owed no small amount of its atmosphere to Korzeniowski's score. The composer is currently receiving no small amount of acclaim for his work on the latest movie from Tom Ford, *Nocturnal Animals*.

Speaking of all these monsters, Waxwork Records released an expanded score to 1981 werewolf film *The Howling*. The Pino Donaggio score was remastered for vinyl, with an additional dozen cuts not previously available. It's available now on 180-gram 'Silver Bullet' vinyl, which is blood red with a silver center, in a tip-on gatefold sleeve featuring art by the excellent Francesco Francavilla, whose art has made the *Afterlife* with *Archie* comics a visually terrifying delight.

Tiger Lab Vinyl bring further anime awesomeness to your turntable with the score to *Urotsukidōji - Legend of the Overfiend*, composed by Masamichi



Amano. The double LP comes on either 'Tentacle Burst' purple marble vinyl, exclusive to the Tiger Lab webstore, or on 'Overfiend Pink'. The madness of the electronics-meets-symphonic music is like a wonderful, frenzied nightmare. Much like the movie, really, minus the tentacles. So many tentacles. You can pre-order it now and it ships the middle of next month.

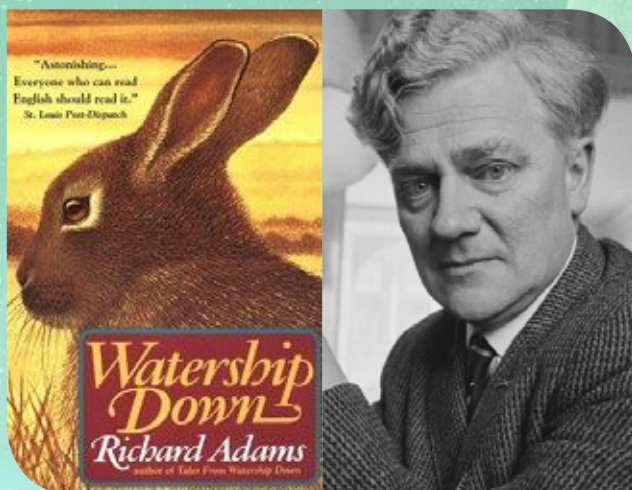
If you came of age in the '90s, there are two vinyl reissues for which you should be thoroughly excited. Through Real Gone Music comes a limited edition reissue of the *Tales From the Crypt* presents: *Demon Knight* soundtrack, which features the debut of Filter's *Hey Man, Nice Shot*, which has been used in seemingly endless films and trailers since, alongside cuts from Pantera, Megadeth, and the Melvins. It's limited to 750 copies on opaque green vinyl.

There's also the expanded reissue of the soundtrack to Cameron Crowe's *Singles*. Though it's by no means genre fare, this soundtrack was absolutely essential for anyone who came of age in the era of the Seattle sound, and a vinyl version's been in demand for years. Thankfully, it appears Smashing Pumpkins' Billy Corgan has stopped obstructing the release (there was supposed to be a 20th anniversary edition in 2012), and we'll get it in time for the film's 25th anniversary. Due out next month is a triple LP or double CD set, featuring all the cuts from the original release, as well as tracks from the film that never made it on the soundtrack album, such as Truly's *Heart and Lungs*. We're beyond excited about this.



BRAVE NEW WORDS

ED FORTUNE BRINGS
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GENRE LITERATURE



Richard Adams 1920 - 2016

Watership Down author Richard Adams has died aged 96. He passed away peacefully on Christmas Eve, 2016. Adams' tale of rabbits escaping from a doomed warren first came out in 1972 and defined an entire fantasy subgenre. The book continues to be a massive seller, with movie and radio adaptations being a semi-regular occurrence.

Professional Troll Gets Book Deal. Maybe.

'Alt-Right' Sad Puppy supporter and mouthpiece for hire Milo Yiannopoulos is currently claiming to have struck a book deal with Threshold Editions, an imprint of Simon and Schuster. Milo has made previous claims about books in the past, though these have not materialised. At time of going to print, 'Alt-Right' news sources are claiming that a boycott of Simon and Schuster is planned by Milo's critics. However this does seem unlikely, as his critics have been mostly ignoring Milo ever since he was kicked off Twitter for his role in the online abuse of the **Ghostbusters** actor Leslie Jones.

WORST WITCH to Ride Again

Puffin Books is to relaunch Jill Murphy's **The Worst Witch** series, on the back of a new UK-based CBBC adaptation. The new kid's show stars Amanda Holden, Kacey Ainsworth, and Nicola Stephenson. Jill Murphy's timeless adventures of accident-prone but lovable Mildred Hubble have been long running hit amongst parents and kids alike, though their star has faded in recent years due to the rise of **Harry Potter**. **The Worst Witch**, about a trainee witch, was first published in 1974 by Allison and Busby. The seven-book series has sold over four million copies internationally.

Drones Invade UK

Amazon has begun using drones to deliver parcels to customers in the UK, though only if you live in Cambridge. It is a limited trial programme.

Customers using the service can choose from 'thousands of items' held in a warehouse. Designs for a large 'drone carrier' are also being tested by the retail giant. When the plan for drones was originally announced by Amazon in 2015, book publisher Waterstones sarcastically responded by saying that they planned to train owls to deliver books. Alas, this Hogwarts-inspired plan appears to be entirely fictional.

Moomins Invade London

The first major UK exhibition dedicated to the Moomins and the life of their Finnish creator Tove Jansson has opened in London's Royal Festival Hall. The exhibit, called **Adventures in Moominland**, is an immersive and interactive exhibition. Displays include recreated scenes from the books and exhibits of more than forty original drawings and other archive materials.

Fantasycon 2017 Coming to Peterborough

The British Fantasy Society's Annual Convention, Fantasycon, is coming to The Bull Inn in Peterborough. The event is being organised by Allen Stroud's events company HWS. The event, a last minute replacement for a previously planned affair that fell through, will run from September 29th to October 1st.

J. K. Rowling to Write More

In a move that should not surprise anyone, J. K. Rowling has announced that she has at least two more books in her. One will be another detective story under her Robert Galbraith moniker. The other may well be another book set in the Harry Potter world. Rowling remains tight-lipped as to what it will be, but with many more Potterverse movies planned, it seems likely.

Nominations Still Open for 2017 Hugo Awards

2017 will see Worldcon come to Helsinki, from August 9th to the 13th. It's the biggest sci-fi book festival in the world so well worth a quick trip to Europe to take in the sight of the thing. While you are at it, don't forget that supporters and attendees of Worldcon can vote in the Hugo awards. We'd like to remind those going that STARBURST Magazine has podcasts that qualify for the Best Fancast Category: Brave New Words and The STARBURST Radio Podcast.

Edge Lit 2017 to Feature Joanne Harris and Stephen Baxter

Edge Lit is the UK's premier genre one-day event. With book launches happening throughout the day and workshops from the great and the good of the UK book scene, it really is the place to be seen if you wish to get ahead in the world of genre books. Guests of Honour will include award-winning author Stephen Baxter, who is best known for his hard science fiction, and Booker Prize-winning wit Joanne Harris (**Chocolat**).



Catch STARBURST's own book podcast, **Brave New Words**, via our website starburstmagazine.com and on Twitter @radiobookworm.

COMING SOON



INFINITY ENGINE (TRANSFORMATION - BOOK THREE)

AUTHOR: NEAL ASHER

PUBLISHER: TOR

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 23RD

Artificial intelligence, space battles, and an entire civilisation hanging in a delicate balance; it must be Neal Asher's latest. As rogue AIs grow all the more deadly, the future of the Polity looks in doubt. The damaged war factory responsible for the worst machines is now overrun, and the technology within has gone wild. Only a small number of heroes remain within, fighting for survival. Outside the war factory, a black hole hides a secret that could destroy everything.



THE BOOK OF BERA

AUTHOR: SUZIE WILDE

PUBLISHER: PENGUIN

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 23RD

Everyone likes a good Viking saga. **The Book of Bera** focuses on a young woman called (as you may be able to guess), Bera. She is dubiously blessed with 'Sight' and the ability to control the spirit of her long-dead twin.

Things go wrong for Bera when her best friend Bjorn is killed and she is blamed for the tragedy. With her father using this as an excuse to put her into a marriage, Bera has to take charge of her world and use her determination and talents to put things right.



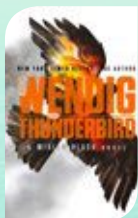
GRIMBEARD: TALES OF THE LAST DWARF

AUTHOR: SAMWISE DIDIER

PUBLISHER: POCKET BOOKS

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 21ST

Samwise Didier is the Artistic Director for Blizzard Entertainment, the lovely people behind **Warcraft**, **Diablo**, and **Overwatch**. Captain Grimbeard is the beautifully illustrated tale of a dwarf who wakes up with the worst hangover ever. One night he's drinking epic amounts of ale, and then when he wakes up, he discovers it's hundreds of the years in the future and the world is run by elves. The art looks lovely, and the text sounds very, very silly. We're looking forward to this.



THUNDERBIRD (A MIRIAM BLACK NOVEL)

AUTHOR: CHUCK WENDIG

PUBLISHER: SAGA PRESS

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 1ST

Miriam Black is back. The woman who can tell you exactly how and when you will die, simply by touching you, is now searching for a cure for her condition. The visions are addictive, and Miriam is turning into the sort of monster she struggled so firmly against in previous novels. Will Miriam finally succumb to the darker side of her nature and become a tool of the various death cults that flock to her? Or will she finally come to terms with her gift and learn how to manage them? Expect an explosive journey as we find out.



SHRIKE

AUTHOR: GEORGE MANN

PUBLISHER: BLACK LIBRARY

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 23RD

George Mann is easily one of the most eminent masters of all things **Space Marine**-related. This latest tale of teenage male power fantasies made flesh focuses on the Raven Guard, the bird-themed super soldiers from the **Warhammer 40,000** setting. This particular story follows Shrike, the Chapter Master of the Raven Guard, and his rivalry with Ork warlord Gorkrasha. We assume they're rivals at war and conquest, rather than **Pokémon Go**. Expect the usual nonsense, brilliantly done.



THE COLLAPSING EMPIRE

AUTHOR: JOHN SCALZI

PUBLISHER: TOR

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 23RD

John Scalzi is a man who is never afraid to give you his opinion, a talent that has made him one of the most prominent and recognisable science fiction authors of the 21st Century. His back catalogue includes surreal parodies and overwrought thrillers. His latest offering is a space opera in which the various burgeoning stellar empires are reliant on an alien network called the Flow for intergalactic travel. When this system begins to fail, war is seemingly inevitable. Sounds great to us, we're looking forward to what weird twists Scalzi has hidden between the covers.



THE MEMOIRIST

AUTHOR: NEIL WILLIAMSON

PUBLISHER: NEWCON PRESS NOVELLAS

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 20TH

Newcon Press is one of the most interesting indie publishers out there. Discerning genre fans know that Newcon tends to be a guarantee of something new, entertaining, original, and high quality. **The Memoirist** is set in a world in which everything is recorded. Which makes the case of the rock band the Elodie Eagles a bit of a curiosity. It seems no one wants to acknowledge a very important concert ever existed. As memoirist Rhian investigates the missing elements of the band's story, she finds herself on a very dangerous path, one that could well change everything for everyone.



MONSTRESS: VOLUME 2

AUTHOR: MARJORIE LIU, SANA TAKEDA

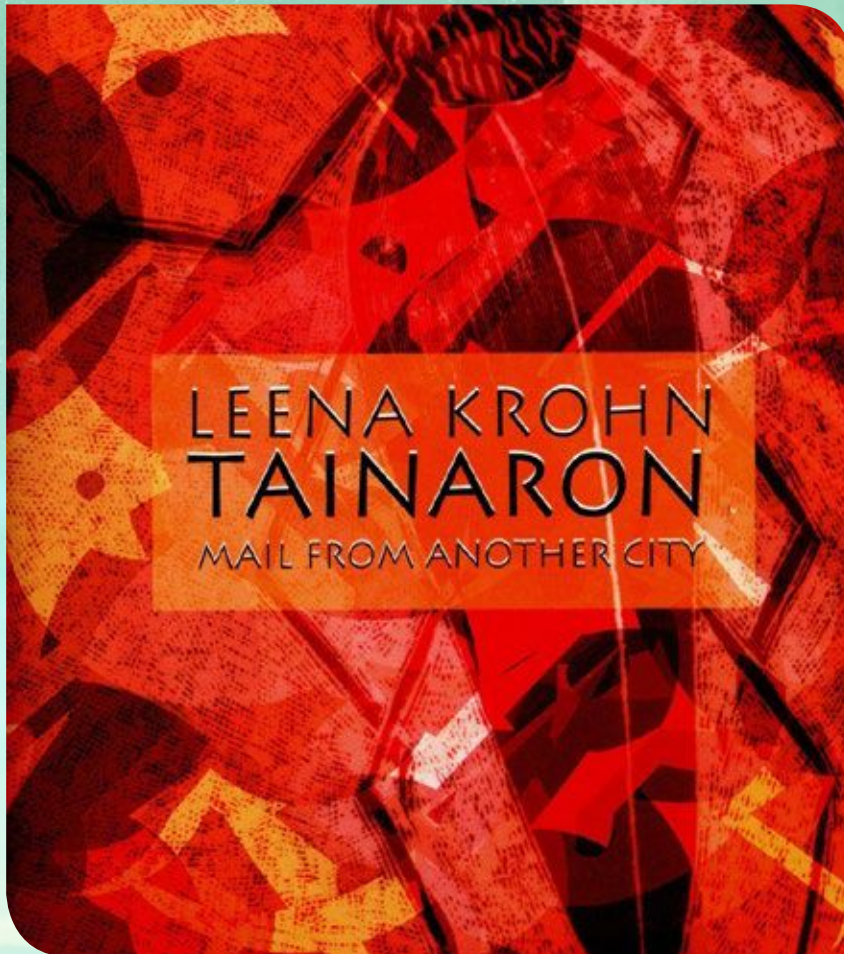
PUBLISHER: IMAGE COMICS

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 6TH

If you've not been following the utterly gorgeous **Monstress** series, then you need to go out and treat yourself. Set in a matriarchal fantasy Asia, it's the tale of magical creatures who sometimes can pass for human and the mages who exploit these creatures for their own ends. **Volume Two** will continue to focus on Maika Halfwolf who is on the path to avenge her dead mother. Strong themes of inner strength, struggle, and magic lurk within. And did we mention how pretty it all looks?

BOOK WORMHOLE

A MONTHLY PICK
OF GENRE FICTION
BY KATE FATHERS



The plot of Leena Krohn's *Tainaron: Mail from Another City* is very simple: an unnamed narrator writes letters to an unnamed recipient from a city across the sea populated by (mostly) human-sized insects. Each chapter is a single letter, a vignette that describes the narrator's exploration of the city and interactions with its people. On the face of it, it doesn't sound like a very important story. In fact, it might sound like the least sci-fi science fiction book ever written.

It is anything but.

Tainaron, at its core, is a book about people. A lot of this is down to the character construction; Krohn's narrator is at once an independent character and no character at all. While they have a distinctive voice, they don't have a name or a gender (and there are no clues as to what they might be), allowing readers to completely immerse themselves in

the character - to become them. To truly experience *Tainaron* as the narrator does. This book is as much about the reader as it is about the narrator, and the fullest verisimilitude occurs if (like me) you have ever lived in another city or country. You not only empathise with the narrator, you remember when you were in similar circumstances. You remember the thrill of being in a new place, and the fullness of your curiosity, and the effervescent excitement you felt as you explored the new city. And you remember how hard it could be to start from scratch; how frustrating and how isolating. There is struggle and conflict in *Tainaron*, but it's mostly struggle with the self and the environment - the struggle for understanding and connection. This struggle is compounded by the lack of response from the person the narrator is writing to. The letters are the narrator's

last ties to their old life and, in some ways, to their humanity. Those ties are already weak due to time and distance, but with every failed reply they weaken further. The narrator is left alone to figure out who they are now, in *Tainaron*, and to figure out how to connect with people who are so different from them. Everyone can relate to this kind of narrative. Everyone, at some point, has been a fish out of water. And the narrator's experience rings so true that you can't help but be affected by it, and root for them to find companionship. You remember what is most important: not objects or money, but people.

Tainaron's use of sci-fi also emphasises the importance of people. None of the letters are dated, and no details are given about *Tainaron's* place in space or relation to humans. To the narrator, *Tainaron* is ordinary. They don't waste time explaining what they already know. Instead, they focus on the people, and history, and everyday life that is important to them. *Tainaron* is quiet sci-fi, where the science fiction elements serve to add another layer to the expat narrative. The insectoid aliens are *actually* insects, with the behaviour and appearance that goes with that. Some insects hibernate during the winter. Some create a cocoon and metamorphose into completely different people. These stark differences make it so much harder for the narrator to find a commonality, and easier to isolate themselves. I won't say whether or not they do find that commonality, but the narrator does build relationships. Their friendship with Longhorn, their guide, culminates in the most wonderful moment of bridging differences. Species is not a barrier in *Tainaron*. In fact, the only barrier is *you* - your personality and attitudes and willingness to try. It's an important message to impart: when it comes to people, nothing else matters except who you are.

As for the prose, *Tainaron* was originally published in Finnish in 1985 and then translated in to English in 2004, and it is one of the best translations I've read. I often forgot I was reading a translation at all. The description is vivid, and the dialogue is great, and while there are a few grammatical errors, I can count them on one hand.

Tainaron is poised to be one of my favourite books. It's a book that resonates, focusing on emotion rather than the explosions and battles against space cults that you often expect from science fiction. Sometimes, sci-fi can be about connection. Sometimes it can be about finding yourself. I couldn't recommend it more. ✦

THE LATEST RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



THE ART OF ROGUE ONE: A STAR WARS STORY

**AUTHOR: JOSH KUSHINS / PUBLISHER:
ABRAMS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

Most STARBURST readers will have seen *Rogue One* by now, many no doubt more than once. There's a lot to appreciate about the *Star Wars* spin-off – the lively gang of rebels, the plot that dovetails neatly into *A New Hope*, Forest Whitaker's *Shatner-level* hamming – but one element really worthy

of appreciation is just how gorgeous and cinematic Gareth Edwards' movie is. It was a difficult film to design – it had to reflect the style of the original trilogy enough to segue seamlessly into it and yet had to break new ground of its own – but everyone involved did a perfect job. *The Art of Rogue One*, a hefty hardcover book, celebrates that achievement.

Over about 250 pages, this book collects the concept art behind all the locations, characters, and ships that appear in the film, as well as storyboards showing how vital scenes were planned. *Star Wars* has a long history of beautiful concept art – in fact, a 1979 book of Ralph McQuarrie's iconic *Star Wars* concepts is what inspired Doug Chiang to go into this business – and the artists on this film don't let the side down.

Chiang and Neil Lamont worked as co-production designers, alongside a team including Matt Allsopp, Ryan Church, and costume designer (and comics artist) Glyn Dillon, all of whose works feature here. As well as marveling at the beautifully painted versions of favourite scenes, it's also fascinating to see what didn't make it to the screen, such as the original line-up of the *Rogue One* squad, which included two

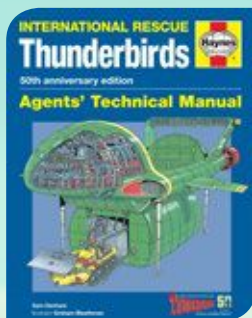
mismatched aliens who were eventually replaced with Chirrut Îmwe and Baze Malbus.

As the book progresses through the film's story, Josh Kushins' detailed commentary shines a light on the creative processes involved. There are similarly insightful forewords by Chiang, Lamont, and Gareth Edwards. You'll be intrigued to learn about the many stages of design the squad's ship went through, which classic movies influenced the designs, and the team's unusual approach to storyboarding, with Edwards focusing on creating one iconic shot per scene. The overall impression is that Edwards is a very visually imaginative director who worked unconventionally closely with the design team throughout the entire process – a conclusion supported by the stunning visuals of the completed *Rogue One*.

Whether to learn more about the creative processes, to impress guests, or just to look at the pretty pictures, *The Art of Rogue One* is a real gem of a book, which will easily occupy many hours of any *Star Wars* fan's life.

KIERON MOORE

★★★★★★★★★★ 10



THUNDERBIRDS AGENTS' TECHNICAL MANUAL: 50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

**AUTHOR: SAM DENHAM / ILLUSTRATOR:
GRAHAM BLEATHMAN / PUBLISHER: HAYNES /
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

Times change and so does the world of publishing. Haynes, for years best known for publishing automobile manuals full of cutaway diagrams explaining in intricate detail exactly how motor cars go vroom vroom, are now branching out into a slightly geekier arena. This colourful softcover volume, originally published in 2012 and now reissued with new illustrations, belatedly celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of Gerry Anderson's *Thunderbirds* by taking it all terribly seriously, presenting eye-

bogglingly intricate details of International Rescue's mechanical paraphernalia with supporting text chronicling the history of the organisation and its key personnel.

As a piece of imaginative research, it's hard to fault writer Sam Denham's text, the first few pages of which paint the picture of the future-world of 2065 and all the technical marvels and socio-political machinations that enabled the International Rescue organisation to come into being. Beautifully presented colour photographs illustrate not only the *Thunderbird* craft and their ancillary rescue machines such as *The Mole*, *the Monobrake* and *the Thunderizer*, but also the famous Tracy brothers, International Rescue's London agent Lady Penelope and many of the improbable and impractical-looking machines whose catastrophic exploits would inevitably lead to *Thunderbirds* becoming, in a very real sense, go. For example, the *Sidewinder* is a lovely design but with its wonky gyroscopic metal legs it's a wonder it ever made its way off the drawing board. The bulk of the Manual is made up of mind-bending cutaway diagrams of the *Thunderbirds* themselves and all the other assorted vehicles which turned up in the TV show's 21st-century world – and impressive as they are as illustrations, it's hard to imagine anyone sitting down and painstakingly poring over the diagrams and matching the annotated

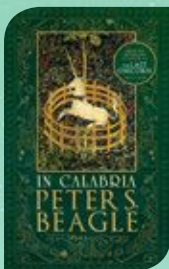
descriptions of exposed circuitry, sensors and thrusters with the cutaways themselves. Page after page rolls by in a dizzying rush of imaginary spaceships and vehicles with their innards exposed and explained as if they really existed in such extraordinary detail. The overriding effect is of a project which is incredibly impressive and quite clearly the work of enormously talented and dedicated people – and yet, a bit like a model of Buckingham Palace made out of ice cream, it seems a bit pointless. But perhaps we're being a bit churlish; we love *Thunderbirds* here at STARBURST and it's a mark of the show's enduring popularity that over half a century after it first aired, it's still able to generate merchandise which is clearly an absolute labour of love for the people who've gone way beyond the extra mile to make it happen.

Ultimately, the *Agents' Technical Manual* is one you're likely to pick up, flick through and gasp at before slipping onto your bookshelf, although if you're so inclined, have enough spare cash and come from the future, at least this book will tell you exactly what you need and how you go about building your own fleet of space-age faster-than-sound rescue vessels. Well, what are you waiting for? Get yer soldering iron out...

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★ 6

STARBURST



IN CALABRIA

AUTHOR: PETER S. BEAGLE

PUBLISHER: TACHYON PUBLICATIONS

RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 14TH

Claudio Bianchi is a reclusive farmer who lives contentedly with his animals on an Italian hillside. His life is quiet and uneventful and he likes it that way, and he

passes his time writing poetry he will never show to anybody. But then the unicorn arrives, and Claudio's peaceful solitary existence is rapidly turned upside down. For some reason, the unicorn has chosen Claudio's farm as the place where she will give birth to her foal, and try as he might, Claudio is unable to prevent this news from reaching the village and beyond. When the world's press descends, Claudio manages to keep the animals hidden. But when a mobster appears and makes Claudio an offer he literally cannot refuse, events take a nasty, extremely violent turn...

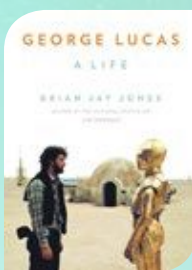
In Calabria is a simple story and a very quick read – barely 160 pages long – but Peter S.

Beagle condenses more beauty, imagination, poetry and magic into this wonderful novella than most authors can pack into novels that are five or six times the length. His most famous work, *The Last Unicorn*, was first published in 1968 and Beagle has been an icon of fantasy storytelling ever since. It's truly a delight to see him return to the subject of unicorns again, although In Calabria is far less about unicorns than it is about the marvellous two-legged characters that inhabit its pages. The stripped-down simplicity of Beagle's prose, the uncluttered authenticity of his dialogue, and the keen emotional intelligence that shines behind his words makes this – as with all his stories – an absolute joy

to read. Beagle has that rare gift – the ability, within just a few words, to transport the reader completely into his universe, making the unfamiliar become vividly real. More than that, his skill at portraying genuine romantic love, the kind of honest and complicated love that transforms us as human beings and aches so hard it makes your heart break, is unsurpassed – and it forms the basis of an important subplot in In Calabria that we deliberately didn't mention in the synopsis because it's best that you discover it for yourself. Read this book, and be prepared to see the world through completely new eyes.

IAN WHITE

★★★★★★★★★★ 10



GEORGE LUCAS: A LIFE

AUTHOR: BRIAN JAY JONES

PUBLISHER: HEADLINE PUBLISHING

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

With impeccable timing comes this new biography of George Lucas, perhaps the most important geek icon of them all. There is, after all, never a better time than at the launch of a new Star Wars-branded movie. And believe me, there's no better gift

for Star Wars fans, because it's as definitive a look at the man's life and legacy as your imperial credits can buy.

There have been several biographies of Lucas over the years: *Skywalking* by Dale Pollock was excellent but finished at the release of *Return of the Jedi*; George Lucas by John Baxter went as far as the release of *The Phantom Menace*. They were great as far as they went, but obviously left with the story in flux, and the reader in a kind of limbo as Lucas's mighty empire was still rolling on with more films to make and unfolding tales of his life to tell.

This new book draws heavily upon the earlier books, which are credited as sources of reference – and this is understandable. There are, after all, a finite number of anecdotes about Lucas's early years, his upbringing in Modesto,

his near-fatal car accident, and his formative years in USC that can be told and recounted by those who were there at the time. So, in effect, the first third of the book reads as very familiar, bordering on repetitive.

The book's real value, of course, is in recounting the events post-*Phantom Menace*, examining the period in the director's life when he seemingly lost his creative touch, becoming obsessed with pushing the boundaries of digital effects and computer-generated locations. Lucas' trials and frustrations, leading to the completion of the prequel trilogy to a less than stellar reception by the die-hard fans of the original trilogy, are well documented here.

The book rounds off with the sale of Lucas' empire to Disney in one of the biggest, most expensive acquisitions in

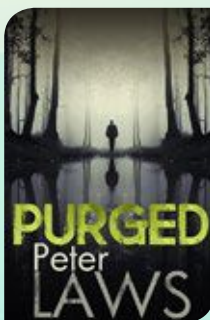
the history of motion pictures and details how the deal was brokered. In fact, the book's final chapters can be used as a business manual in maximising your own advantage.

There may well be further books about Lucas' amazing life and uncanny business acumen, but this one tells the story of an underachieving comic book and movie fan who became one of the most influential and powerful forces in genre film history to date – and with the Lucasfilm assets sold off, pretty much covers the whole story.

An engaging and entertaining read about an enigmatic and reclusive man. This biography will be regarded as definitive for years to come.

ROBIN PIERCE

★★★★★★★★★★ 10



PURGED

AUTHOR: PETER LAWS

PUBLISHER: ALLISON & BUSBY

RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 16TH

Meet Matt Hunter, the newest detective in town. He's an ex-minister, now a professor of sociology writing a book that

intends to debunk the Christian faith, who helps the police solve religiously motivated crimes. He's a married man with a family, but when they holiday in a seemingly idyllic country village, things take a turn for the strange. Residents are going missing, and it's not long before a body turns up.

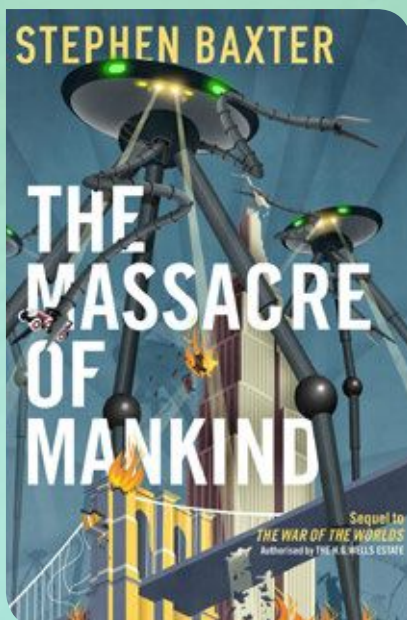
Author Peter Laws – himself a Baptist minister – writes a tight and gripping story here, all the more impressive considering it's his first novel. Hunter is far from a clichéd detective, but he retains the trope of being troubled by his doubts, and it's this that makes him a fascinating character. Those who surround him are equally well drawn; so much so that when the killer is revealed (after some gripping chapters, in particular the first, told from their point of

view) it's not only believable, but may come as a surprise to even the most seasoned of crime fiction readers. Where Laws really excels, though, is in the moments when he's aiming to chill the reader. There's a sense at times that any horrific or supernatural elements may have been toned down in order to make this a more lucrative crime novel, which is a shame as Laws hints at the otherworldly a couple of times; we're first introduced to him at a case where a woman is claimed to be possessed, while the final denouement suggests there's more to what's been going on than meets the eye. We'd have liked to see a little more of this, and hope Laws builds on it, as it's this aspect of his writing that really shines.

That said, he's created a solid foundation with *Purged*, a book that is nigh impossible to put down and will leave the reader hooked from start to finish. Anyone expecting a minister to extol the virtues of his faith on every page will be surprised (sometimes even shocked, as there are moments when Laws appears to do the exact opposite), but he does leave the reader with food for thought. So, let's welcome Matt Hunter to the world of macabre crime fiction. He's a damaged, complicated and interesting man, and we're looking forward to spending more time with him.

ALISTER DAVISON

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



THE MASSACRE OF MANKIND

AUTHOR: STEPHEN BAXTER

PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Only the bravest – some might say most foolish – writers would choose to pen a sequel to one of the great classics of science fiction literature. Surely some books are unimpeachable works of fiction whose story is so roundly told and whose world is so perfectly formed, that they don't need the ignominy of a return visit decades later by writers who can't help but bring their own twenty-first-century sensibilities to ideas which sparkled and shone with the innocence of the times they were written in (and for)? We need only think of Simon Clark's execrable *Night of the Triffids*, which utterly misunderstood the point and thrust of John Wyndham's glorious *Day of the*

Triffids, to appreciate how ill-advised an idea it is to tamper with genre classics. But then there's Stephen Baxter's exquisite, occasionally mind-blowing *The Time Ships*, a 1995 sequel to H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, which shows us that, if it has to be done, this is the way to do it.

Fortunately, the omens are good for *The Massacre of Mankind*, the official sequel to Wells' *War of the Worlds* (and sanctioned, like its predecessor, by the late author's estate) as Baxter is on board again. The prolific author brings his prodigious imagination to the concepts created by Wells over a hundred years ago where *The Time Ships* occasionally boggled with its extraordinary inventiveness, *The Massacre of Mankind* is, by and large, a more restrained affair. It's some fifteen years since the Martians blazed their way across space to Earth and ignited the first 'war of the worlds' and, in what's clearly an alternate Earth timeline, mankind has moved onwards and upwards, using salvaged Martian technology to benefit the human race which still, despite the hardships it has endured, has a propensity for fighting in and amongst itself.

But anxious eyes are watching the stars. Our new narrator – Julie, the sister-in-law of the original story's hero, now named Walter Jenkins – receives a telephone call from Walter (presently residing in Germany) who has a grim warning; Earth and Mars are, as they were fifteen years before, at a cosmic position advantageous to the Martians should they chose to launch another assault upon the world. The Armed Forces are discreetly mobilised and the human race prepares for the worst. But the worst is even worse this time. The Martians arrive en masse in their devastating cylinders, flattening towns and villages and emerging from their pits in the heat ray-wielding tripods with far more haste than during their first invasion, they quickly set about demolishing London and occupying, at first, Southern England. But even as a slightly long-winded and tenuous plan is

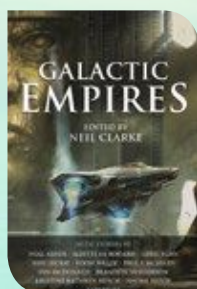
hatched to bring the Martians down for good some time later, thousands of cylinders are launched from Mars and they begin to fall to Earth all around the planet...

Stephen Baxter has written a gripping, page-turning adventure novel bristling with imagination and which doesn't stray a million miles away from the tone and style of the original. There are concessions to a modern audience, of course, not least in its feisty female heroine and numerous descriptions of heat ray victims vaporised and incinerated, flashing into fire, and one memorable sequence in which a young victim of an explosion has been flung across a room against a wall where he has simply burst open. Nice. Elsewhere, there are vivid and exhausting set pieces depicting the relentless march of the tripods and the ferocious firestorm they unleash upon city after city as the narrative broadens and we travel to Australia and India to witness the fall of man. Deep in the heart of the Martian occupation of England, our heroes – a richly drawn, colourful bunch – witness the horrors of 'the drips', where terrified human prisoners, living blood banks, are held captive by the alien invaders. Baxter creates a genuine sense of dread and repulsion with some stomach-churning images of doomed humanity trapped and desperate in Martian pits with no hope of escape, awaiting a pitiful, painful death.

There are some longueurs in the narrative, however, where Baxter becomes slightly self-indulgent with his cast of characters who sometimes take a little too long to get to where you really want them to be. Ultimately, though, *The Massacre of Mankind* is a terrific, powerful, hugely-readable novel which in no way disgraces the original and is a fitting, worthy and highly-recommended final end – perhaps – to the greatest interplanetary conflict in science fiction history.

PAUL MOUNT

★★★★★★★★★ 9



GALACTIC EMPIRES

EDITOR: NEIL CLARKE

PUBLISHER: NIGHT SHADE BOOKS

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Chances are the phrase 'galactic empire' conjures one of two images, the first being an evil despot in possession of a planet-busting space station, while the second is that of a benign conglomeration

of planets seeking new civilisations to join their group. Obviously, there's much more to the concept than that, which is something editor Neil Clarke seeks to address in this collection of stories.

All have seen print before, in various magazines and websites, ranging as far back as 2003. Clarke has assembled a wide range of authors – from old masters like Robert Silverberg to more recent talents such as Aliette de Bodard – each offering a different take on the central premise. The stories range in length from sixteen to fifty pages and, while some contain vast amounts of description and techno-speak, others leave some work for the reader. There isn't a bad piece amongst them, although some are denser than others, and less

patient readers may feel like they've had to wade through treacle to get to the final payoff.

That said, Clarke has ensured that there's something for everyone. Yet the true success of the collection is in showing that, however high the concept, it's the effect on the characters that truly drives a good story; it's all very well having a great idea, but it's those who live within that idea that really matter. While it's hard to pick out a 'best', a personal favourite would be *The Muse Of Empires Lost* by Paul Berger, which drip-feeds information to the reader as the story progresses, climaxing in an ending that is unpredictable, yet entirely character-driven, and succeeds in making the strange entirely plausible.

Perhaps this collection's

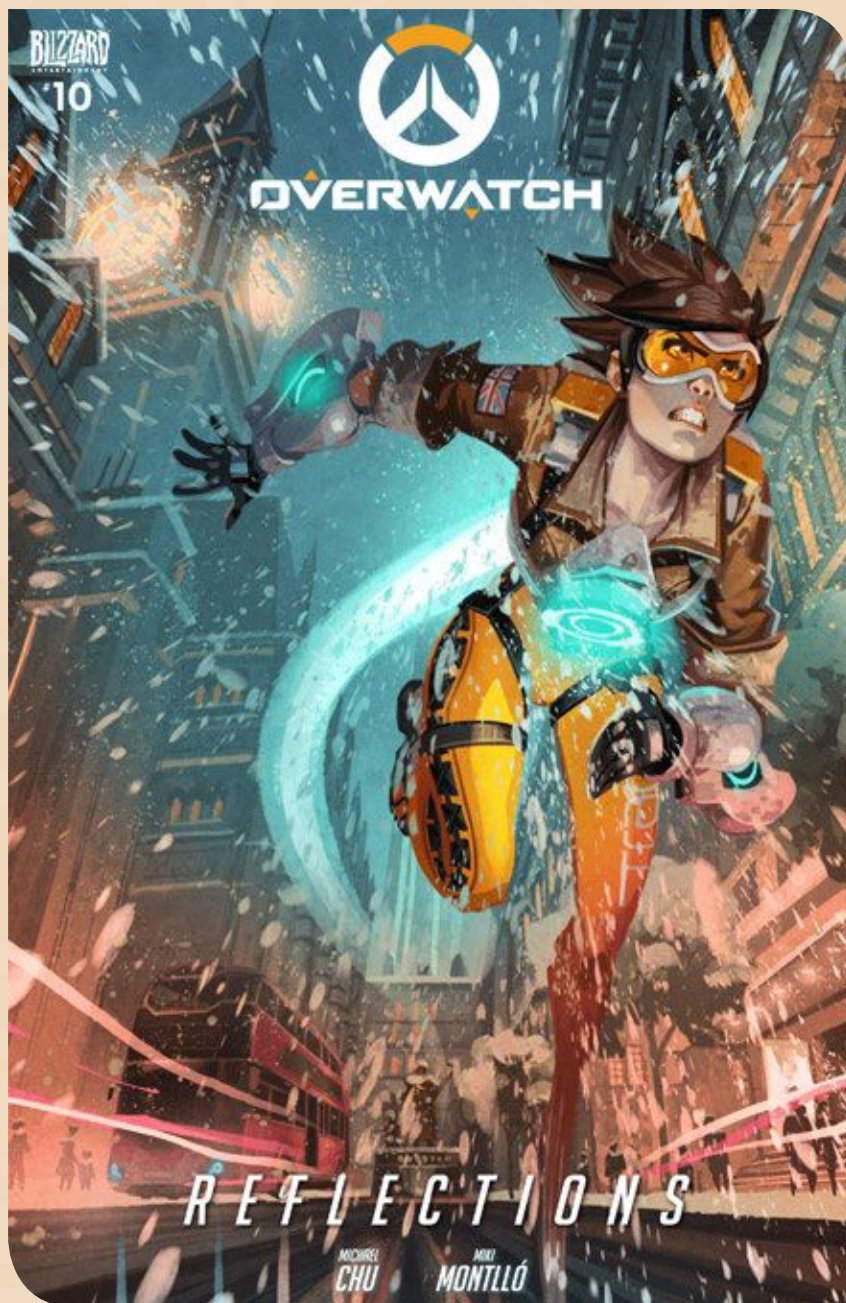
only weakness is that some of the stories feel like they expect some prior knowledge of an author's work to fully understand the setting. Readers who are discovering these authors for the first time may be missing an in-joke, or find themselves wondering if the characters have appeared anywhere before, and are being offered a contrasting perspective. The opposite effect of this is that it encourages readers to seek out those works and dive into the worlds they themselves have just discovered; given that there are twenty-two stories in this hefty tome, the galaxy really is there for the taking.

ALISTER DAVISON

★★★★★★★★★ 8

VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

GARETH EVANS PULLS MONITOR DUTY TO BRING YOU THE LATEST FROM THE WORLD OF COMIC BOOKS



was so prominent in the game's marketing. Many game franchises expand on their stories with comics; if a game you love has a comic, check it out (unless that comic is *Tekken Forever*, in which case kill it with fire).

And in other tie-in news, the new *Power Rangers* movie is already booked for a sequel in comic book form. *Power Rangers: Aftershock* is due for release on March 29th (published by BOOM!). I have looked at the cover, and though I wasn't sure about the new costumes at first but I think they look good in comic book form.

And that isn't the only comic book sequel to look forward to. On January 12th, *2000 AD* released an omnibus collection of its *War of the Worlds* sequel, *Scarlet Traces*. The collection will also include *2000 AD*'s adaptation of *The War of the Worlds*.

DeadEndia (an indie comic that received great acclaim for its LGBT themes in 2015) will be updating online again soon. The second season (apparently comics can have seasons now, too) will be starting this month (January). Hopefully, it means by the time you read this it will be ready for you to check out. The first season is available to read online, and thanks to a successful Kickstarter is about to be released in paperback form. *DeadEndia* focuses on a group of theme park employees who work in a haunted house attraction that is actually haunted.

You may have noticed that I usually try to give some column space to times when I think comics have tackled an important issue or helped the world in some way. *Ms. Marvel* #13 depicted the superhero overcoming adversity not by hitting someone really, really hard (the thought does occur to her, though) but by making the effort to reach people and ensure they vote. The importance of voting is one that cannot be overstated. Hopefully, the comic will reach some of its readers and encourage them to use their voice the next time they have the opportunity to do so. The reason I keep talking about such stories is that comic books (like all forms of media) can have a good influence on people, and I like to celebrate when they do so for a cause worth supporting.

Another example of this is the reaction of the creators of comic book *Southern Bastards* (Jason Latour and Jason Aaron) to online harassment. *Southern Bastards* #16 went on sale January 11th with a very special variant

A lot of time has been spent on the story and characters of a video game called *Overwatch*, but very little of that story is shown in the game itself. Blizzard has instead chosen to build on the characters of *Overwatch* in other media, such as *Overwatch: Reflections*, a recently released comic.

(don't worry, this hasn't become a video game column while no one was looking). In the comic, Tracer, the character who appears on *Overwatch*'s cover, is revealed to (as has since been confirmed) be gay. It is always good to see more diverse representation in media, especially with a character who



cover; proceeds from the issues sold with the variant cover will go to the Southern Poverty Law Center (who work to combat hatred) and the American Civil Liberties Union (who work to defend civil rights). This is not the first time that the pair have used their comic to raise money for a good cause. In July 2015, *Southern Bastards* #10 raised \$18,000 for the victims of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church shooting.

Well, since it's over half way into this column and I've only discussed superheroes once, I should probably move on to some DC news. This month, the main villain of the *Justice League vs. Suicide Squad* crossover (because there is always a villain working behind the scenes in these stories) was revealed to be Maxwell Lord. Long-time fans of the



DC Universe may remember him as the guy who received some rather severe chiropractic treatment from Wonder Woman (by which I mean she snapped his neck). More recently, he has shown up (and promptly vanished from) the CBS/CW series *Supergirl*. Maxwell Lord has been involved in some pretty high profile DC stories in the past, and call me optimistic but his inclusion in *Justice League vs. Suicide Squad* raises my interest in the series.

In comic books, there is an old joke that only Uncle Ben stays dead in superhero comics. There were other people who were referred to in the joke but they all went and stopped being dead (Bucky Barnes and Jason Todd). Marvel has brought back another hero who managed to go an impressively

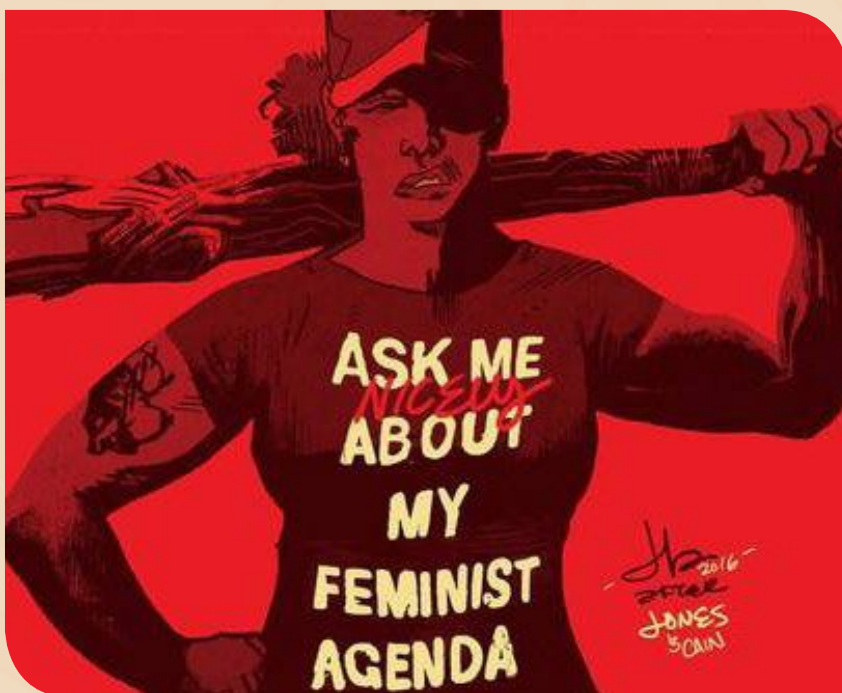


long time without coming back, and that is Ben Reilly. If you don't know who that is, he comes from a very dark time in comic book history known as the nineties, in which everyone was trying to be edgy and extreme, due to a hopeless misunderstanding of books like *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*. Ben Reilly is one of the clones of Peter Parker (he is named Ben after Peter's uncle, and Reilly is May Parker's maiden name). After a very long and confusing story arc known as the Clone Saga (a story arc that Marvel is revisiting for some reason), he was killed off in a fight with the Green Goblin. Apparently, he was brought back under a process that revives people from their remains with their memories and so is a result of something more akin to resurrection than cloning. How this plays out remains to be seen (at the time of writing, there are two more issues left of *Clone Conspiracy*) but to me, this feels like it is borne out of one the problems with superhero comics as a whole, their inability to let things go. It can be nice to revisit the past but this whole event feels like it is spending way too much time there. If too much time is spent on what comics used to be, then it hampers efforts to take them in genuinely new places and as a result they face the risk of just running in place narratively.

I previously reported that DC will be reviving its WildStorm imprint with the comic *The Wild Storm*, written by Warren Ellis, who is also curating the imprint. The description of the first issue reads like a sci-fi thriller, promising transhuman implants and secret space programs.

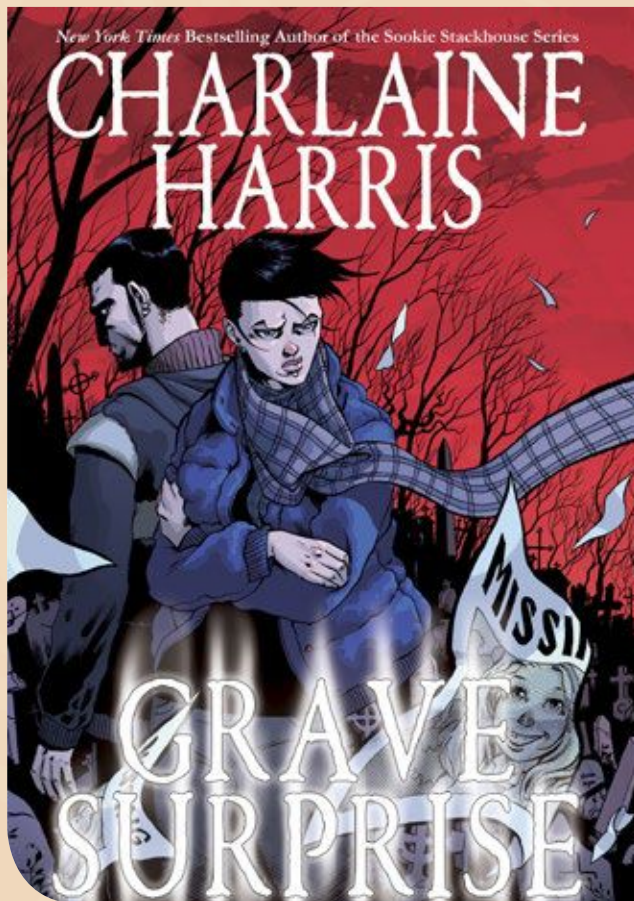
That is all we have time for this month. We have already seen some of what this year has to offer us in terms of comic books, and, like me, we're sure you can't wait to see what else it has in store.

Gareth Evans can be contacted at:
gareth.evans@starburstmagazine.com
 and tweeted @OneTrueGareth



REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC
BOOK RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



GRAVE SURPRISE

WRITER: CHARLAINE HARRIS, ROYAL MCGRAW / ARTIST: ILIAS KYRIAZIS, TAMRA BONVILLAIN / PUBLISHER: DYNAMITE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Written by True Blood author Charlaine Harris, the Harper Connolly novels follow the exploits of their eponymous heroine, gifted by a lightning strike with the ability to sense corpses and intuitively ascertain what made them that way. After Harper discovers the body of a missing teenager she previously failed to locate and in a place neither of them had any reason to be, the coincidence is too unlikely to ignore, and pulls her into the mystery of what happened to the dead girl.

Adapting novels into comics is often a tricky process with variable results, but in the case of *Grave Surprise* it actually works quite well. Harris' writing has a degree of matter-of-fact blandness to it, and so the colourful visuals allow the story to properly come alive in a way denied it by the novel's prosaic prose. It also gives a far clearer portrayal of Harper's abilities, each panel a brief but torturous flash of the suffering of the dying, the crushing weight of the visions engulfing her and their red tint highlighting the shock and pain of the violent deaths. The comic also grants better representation of the supporting characters, who in the novel are little more than an assortment of names without much to distinguish them. Now they also have faces to aid in telling them apart from their indistinct characterisation, better allowing you to



appreciate their emotions.

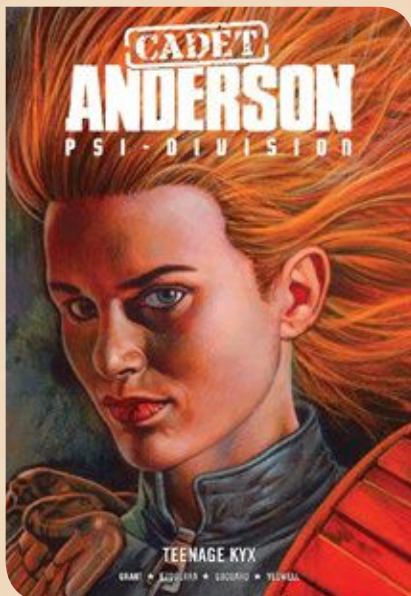
A developing theme as the books progress is the awkward relationship between Harper and her stepbrother Tolliver, a morally dubious attraction growing between them. Regardless of its varying legality, you can't deny there is a certain quick factor in the portrayal of mounting sexual tension between stepsiblings, and as the comic allows for the expression of greater character emotion necessary to the plot, so it also more clearly presents this questionable aspect.

The wide cast of peripheral characters allows for plenty of suspects, and enough details are dropped in at suitable junctures to allow you to accurately point the finger at the culprit ahead of time, although the climactic revelation is delivered in a cascade of poorly paced exposition, which brings the story to a lurching climax.

The transposition of *Grave Surprise* from book to comic ends up as a slight improvement on its source material, but as the book itself was rather mediocre to begin with, this isn't really saying too much.

ANDREW MARSHALL

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



CADET ANDERSON – TEENAGE KYX

WRITER: ALAN GRANT / ARTIST: CARLOS EZQUERRA,
PATRICK GODDARD, STEVE YEOWELL / PUBLISHER:
REBELLION / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

A recurring presence in Judge Dredd stories and her own spin-off strip, Psi-Judge Cassandra Anderson is one of the most popular characters from the world of Mega-City One. 2012's movie Dredd saw a younger Anderson on one of her first cases; around the same time, Alan Grant wrote a series of Cadet Anderson strips, tying into that movie by exploring Anderson's time at the Academy of Law. These stories are now collected together for the first time.

Big Girls Don't Cry is a short and snappy six-pager, which sees a ten-year-old Anderson coming face to face(s) with the serial killer known as Mr. Face. It's a gory little tale, especially considering the youth of its protagonist, and effectively sets up the conflict in Anderson's character – she has to face horrible situations like this and administer justice, but is, and always has been, a more compassionate character than the likes of Dredd.

The title story, Teenage Kyx, jumps ahead a few years. Teenage Anderson goes undercover in the criminal gang behind a series of robberies. It's definitely the kind of story you couldn't imagine Dredd in; not only does Anderson dress in punk garb, but there's an emotional core in her sympathy for gang leader Malinda Kyx, a villain with a tortured past and similar abilities to Anderson.

Next up is Algol, in which Anderson and her tutor Rand are on the trail of a former Psi-Cadet turned murderous perp. This villain, Algol Rey, also has mind powers – albeit much more powerful than any of our Psi-Division heroes. Despite the interesting aesthetic this allows for, as Algol messes with the Judges' senses, the story is rather predictable, with the big twist heavily signposted and dealt with swiftly.

Finally, One in Ten sees Anderson and a group of cadets investigate a sinister trade in human meat. This dark and gruesome tale highlights the difficulty of life as a Psi-Judge, with the horrors of life in the Big Meg only made worse by telepathic abilities. There's an emotional sting when this leads one of the Cadets to desperate measures; however, we never really get to know these characters, introduced just for one story, and the impact might have been greater were

there more supporting character continuity between stories.

There's no real standout among these strips and nothing pushes the boundaries like Alan Grant's earlier and weirder Anderson: Psi-Division stories. Rather, they're largely predictable crime tales albeit with psionically powered villains. Anderson is a compelling hero, with her compassion and youth standing her out from what Dredd readers may be used to, and so keeps this volume entertaining, but other tales do more interesting things with her, while more depth and continuity to the supporting characters would have gone a long way too.

KIERON MOORE

★★★★★☆☆☆☆ 6



THE COMPLETE SCARLET TRACES VOL. 1

WRITER: IAN EEDGINTON / ART: D'ISRAELI /
PUBLISHER: REBELLION / RELEASE DATE:
OUT NOW

You've read H.G. Wells' The War of the Worlds, seen the film and TV versions, got Jeff Wayne's album, seen his musical, yet still want more? Then here for your delight is a comic book adaptation of the novel, plus three stories set a decade after the Martian invasion.

The adaptation neatly provides a view of Victorian gents coping with the arrival of strange objects from Mars, literally in their neighbourhood. At the breakfast table, George mentions that Martian gas has hit the newspaper headlines, making his wife exclaim "George, please don't be vulgar. You're putting me off my kedgeree."

When confronted by the alien critters that stumble out of their enormous cylindrical craft, their appearance is enough to put anyone off their kedgeree. The aliens are obviously intelligent enough to get to Earth, but they have a homicidal streak to them. Although physically weak, they have the technology to wipe out the whole of humanity, and they don't care who tries to stop them.

The glare of their merciless destruction pitches humanity into

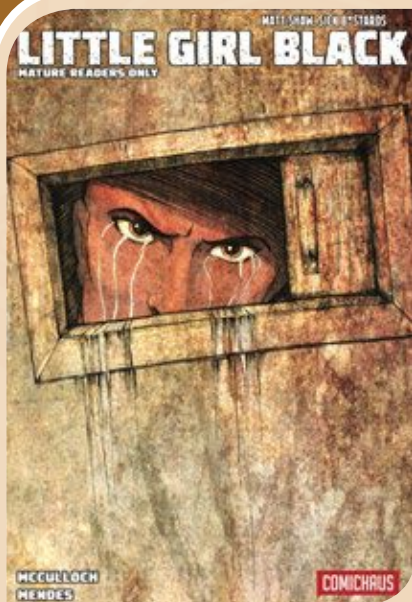
darkness and gloom; we can't stop them with guns or prayers but just as England seems to be doomed, microscopic germs indigenous to our planet kill off the Martian predators.

Fast forward ten years, and we see England transformed by reverse-engineering of the abandoned Martian technology. This has made manufacturing much more efficient at the cost of thousands of jobs and poverty on an unprecedented scale. This leads on to a Sherlock Holmes-type story of the investigation into missing people in the capital. Yes, you guessed it, it's all part of a government conspiracy to hide what really went on behind the scenes when the Martian invasion came to a dead stop.

This is a vivid and exciting version of the original story combined with a wonderful sequel that shows the implications of technological innovation on political aspirations to create a British Empire that will dominate the Solar System.

NIGEL WATSON

★★★★★☆☆☆☆ 9



LITTLE GIRL BLACK #2

WRITER: JAMES MCCULLOCH / ARTIST: PEDRO MENDES / PUBLISHER: COMICHAUS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In the first issue of Little Girl Black, teenager Cass was kidnapped by a sadist with a basement dungeon where he keeps a harem

of captives for his debauched amusement. Seeing as this is now the middle stage of an abduction-abuse-vengeance sequence, it stands to reason that it's also going to be the hardest to stomach, and the story doesn't disappoint. Or to be more specific, it gives you exactly what you expect it will and doesn't apologise for a moment. Now subjected to a regime of brutal torture, she remains fiery and defiant, and you have to wonder at where she draws such a strength of will to remain unbroken while enduring such an ordeal.

Despite the remorseless physical torments, even more disturbing is the accompanying psychological aspect. It's not just that the girls have been beaten down into subjugated submission, their identity reduced to their appearance – Black, Blonde, Red, and Chink – with the intent of dehumanising them by stripping them of everything that makes them who they are. The casual racism that last name signifies also extends to Cass, and you would be right in thinking that Black isn't the only thing she gets called.

Through all this, 'Daddy' seems to genuinely care for the fifth captive Mary, a little girl and the only one of them allowed a name. The clear affection he displays for her actually makes you hate him more for making you empathise with him and feel something towards him other than abject loathing, however minutely and briefly. He loves her like a true father would, and she

reciprocates in kind, fiercely defensive of any criticism in the girls' contemptuous attitudes towards him or from their behaviour lacking what she deems proper deference to the only kind of authority she has ever known.

In as positive a manner as the adjective can be used, Little Girl Black is repulsive and nauseating, and the simple act of pulling your way through the story actually makes you physically uneasy, almost as though the comic itself is silently judging you for having the shameless depravity to even consider reading it.

ANDREW MARSHALL

★★★★★★★★★ 8



THE MUMMY: PALIMPSEST #2

WRITER: PETER MILLIGAN / ARTIST: RONILSON FREIRE / PUBLISHER: TITAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

While Tom Cruise is leading a new Universal screen version of The Mummy for 2017, Hammer has dusted off their version of the tale and brought it to comic books, partnering with Titan Comics. The first issue introduced us to Angelina, a Ukrainian

woman abandoned by her boyfriend to people smugglers.

After escaping from them, Angelina found herself singled out by the sinister Sect of Anubis, who needed her to host the resurrection of the imprisoned spirit of the priestess Nebetah. If they are not successful, the blood-drinking ritual needed to prolong their unnaturally long lives will not happen and death awaits them all. The first issue ended with Angelina succumbing to possession by Nebetah and on the run from the Sect as well as their enemies, the Pyramid Club.

If that's not enough, Ammit, the great demon dog of the Land of the Dead, has travelled to Earth to find a soul to replace the departed Nebetah. As the confused but growing powerful Angelina roams the streets of London, she is hunted by them all. In desperation, she turns to Duncan in the Pyramid Club, who believes there's still time to stop the process and save Angelina.

Building on the set-up from last issue, writer Peter Milligan makes it more explicit this time around that Angelina is the pawn of old men. Literally in the case of the Sect, whose members have lived for over a hundred years by drinking the blood of an unfortunate young woman every 30 or so years. Even the potentially heroic organisation the Pyramid Club is made up of crusty old men who would happily kill Angelina themselves to do 'good'.

Flashback memories Angelina suffers show her that Nebetah herself had been brutally betrayed by her one-time lover Kharis. Thousands of years apart, these two women have both found themselves

abused and used by powerful, amoral men. It gives the story a pleasingly updated perspective and cleverly helps to invest the reader in Angelina's story, even though we know little about her.

Milligan pays tribute to the history of Hammer (from names to the male characters practically stepping out of one of their 1960s films) and folds in references to smartphones and other things that modernise the story. The art and colour (from Ronilson Freire, Ming Sen, and Dijo Lima) might not be spectacular but do the job more than satisfactorily. Overall, it's shaping up nicely and comes recommended.

As with last issue, there's a nice article on the Hammer mummy film series by esteemed studio historian Marcus Hearn, this time focusing on the second film The Curse of the Mummy's Tomb.

JAMES EVANS

★★★★★★★★★ 8



POKEY-CON

Pokey-Con - Your survival guide for the wild and wacky world of conventioning. Cut out, collect and keep.

Correctly identifying a wild Pokey-Con is a valuable life skill.

Impress your friends.



02 Steampunk School Teacher



Rarity: Refined

He was in tweed many, many years before Steampunk was a thing. Maybe it's the monocle. Maybe it's the beard. But could you please stop taking photos? He dresses like this every day.

Favourite Drink: Tea, naturally.

Special Abilities: Look good in Tweed, Wax Mustache, Gentlemanliness

Fame 0, Weirdness: 2, Manners: 10, Costume: 0, Power: 8,

Crunchiness: 3

18 Zen Hot Dog Vendor



Rarity: Medium Rare

You asked for one with everything. They are one with everything. The hotdog glows with cosmic power. Your adventure begins. Or you have food poisoning and you're seeing things.

Favourite Food: Anything but processed meat in a bun

Special Abilities: Know Everything, Add Mustard, Fry Onions

Power: 10, Costume: 4, Weirdness: 10, Regret: 0, Crunchiness: 4,

Silliness: 8

13 Adorable Monster



Rarity: Behind You

Either this is the cutest little horror cosplayer in the world, or you are in serious trouble. Better back away slowly just in case.

Favourite Food: Convention Goers

Special Abilities: Look Innocent, Be Guilty, Outrun Cheerleaders

Fame 7, Weirdness: 7, Silliness: 2, Costume: 9, Power: 8,

Crunchiness: 7

24 Doctor Who?



Rarity: Common

Why be one Doctor when you can be all of them. Maybe they're actually the Doctor, disguised as himself. How would you know?

Favourite Food: Celery

Special Abilities: Fly TARDIS, Look stylish.

Fame 8, Weirdness: 8, Regret: 0, Costume: 13, Power: 4,

Silliness: Yes

Credits:
Art: Andy Mason (blog.andysdrawings.co.uk)
Text and Concept: Ed Fortune
Layout and Design: Mike Smith

ANIME-NATION

A MONTHLY
ROUND UP FROM
THE WORLD OF ANIME
AND MANGA FROM
LITTLEANIMEBLOG.COM'S
DOMINIC CUTHBERT



ATTACK ON TITAN Gets Second Series (Finally)

Love it or loathe it, **Attack on Titan** is probably the biggest anime on the planet and a second series was inevitable. Fans can be forgiven for their impatience, as it's been bloody years since we last caught up with Eren and co. The second season is now set in stone for April, with Tetsurō Araki returning as chief director at WIT Studio, alongside Masashi Koizuka as director, who is stepping up from storyboarding and episode direction.

AKIRA Prototypes Uncovered for Unreleased Game Boy Title

Atari's recently unearthed **ET** game might take the top spot for video game archaeology, but Patrick Scott Patterson (the Video Game Advocate) has uploaded a clip of some Game Boy cartridges he'd uncovered. Here's the rub: they contained an unreleased **Akira** game. Okay, so it seems far-fetched, but a few months after this revelation, Patterson uploaded a new clip of the prototypes running on Super Game Boy. As each game boasts a slightly different version, Patterson plans to take select segments of each and combine them. Eventually, he hopes that the process will produce a playable public prototype.

SOUTH PARK Gives a Nudge to YURI!!! ON ICE and Crunchyroll

Fans of anime and **South Park** have been treated to some excellent otaku parodies over the years. Remember the yaoi episode? *Tweek x Craig* forever! With **Yuri on ICE!!!** being the latest mainstream mover, it's no shocker that Trey Parker and Matt Stone's classic series has worked in a reference. In the episode, Kyle's mum, on scrolling through his little brother Ike's history, sees that he's been looking up **Naruto** on Crunchyroll. It also appears he's been Googling the venerated queer ice-skating anime. The anime even responded with its own Easter egg in its series finale.

MASHIN EIYUDEN WATARU Director Shūji Iuchi Passes Away

Director, animator and scriptwriter Shūji Iuchi has died at the age of 66. In his time, Iuchi helmed such anime as **Galaxy Express 999: Can You Live Like a Warrior!?**, **Ranma ½: Big Trouble in Nekonron, China**, and **Gekito! Crush Gear Turbo**. Only recently, he was drawing storyboards for **Shonen Maid**, **Cerberus**, and **Shounen Ashibe: GO! GO! Goma-chan** among others. From his vast portfolio of work to the fact he worked in anime until the last year of his life, it's this dedication that defines him. The joy and humour of his writing and art will be sorely missed.

REBUILD OF EVANGELION Studio Khara Sues Gainax

Though Gainax struck gold with **Neon Genesis Evangelion** back in the '90s, studio co-founder Hideaki Anno left in 2007 to form Studio Khara, the force behind the **Rebuild of Evangelion** flicks. At first, there were no hard feelings, but Khara has since sued Gainax to the tune of 100 million yen. Gainax was contractually bound to pay royalties to Khara for all projects Anno worked on, but the former is now entrenched in unfulfilled back payments. Khara also made a loan to Gainax of 100 million yen in August 2014, but are now suing to get that amount back. And people say Shinji is whiny!

Hollywood's NARUTO goes ahead, Boruto gets anime series

Like it or not, it seems the live-action Hollywood **Naruto** is going ahead. On the **Naruto X Boruto** stage at Jump Festa, it was announced that Michael Gracey is attached to direct. No surprises here, but there has been one addition that might comfort fans – manga author Masashi Kishimoto himself is in cahoots with the Lionsgate production. While Kishimoto works on that, he'll also be involved with the anime for his hero's son, Boruto. April will see the beginning of the next saga, based on Ukyō Kodachi and Mikie Ikimoto's manga **Boruto: Naruto Next Generations**.

Transgender Story Wins This Manga Is Amazing! Grand Prix

It's a watershed moment for representation after the 'Kono Manga ga Sugoi!' ('This Manga Is Amazing!') guidebook presented its 7th Grand Prix Award to Ayumi's **ECHOES**, a manga exploring themes of transgenderism. In the story, partially based on the author's own experiences, the members of a female basketball team each struggle with their own confusions. Protagonist Sei is distressed by the fact that she doesn't feel right in her own body, knowing her mind is male though she's seen by everyone else as female. Here's hoping that **ECHOES** will be picked up for western readers at some point soon.



THE LATEST ANIME
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED

REVIEWS



AKIRA: THE COLLECTOR'S EDITION

DUAL / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: KATSUHIRO ÔTOMO / SCREENPLAY: IZÔ HASHIMOTO, KATSUHIRO ÔTOMO / STARRING: MITSUO IWATA, NOZOMU SASAKI, MAMI KOYAMA, TESSHÔ GENDA, HIRÔSHI Otake / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Thirty years after World War III in Neo-Tokyo, Kaneda and Tetsuo, two members of a biker gang, find themselves wrapped up in a rebellion and a secret military project which is attempting to bring back a powerful god-like being called Akira. After an accident involving one of the test subjects, Tetsuo is taken by the military and experimented upon.

Akira is a landmark in animated films and Japanese animation. It and *Ghost in the Shell* are widely regarded as classics in their genre and helped to popularise the anime form in western countries. They have been deeply influential, inspiring filmmakers such as James Cameron and films like *The Matrix*. Their presence is still felt today. *Ghost in the Shell*, which itself has several television series and films to its name, has been adapted into a live-action film, notoriously starring Scarlett Johansson, which is to be released in March. A live-action adaptation of Akira has been mooted for several years now, with Leonardo DiCaprio's production

house attempting to make the film. It has had directors attached and then lost, and has struggled to get very far in a murky development hell. It's not difficult to see why it is such a problem. The 1988 film, adapted by Katsuhiro Ôtomo from his own six-volume manga, is so intrinsically linked to its form that it is difficult to see how it would transfer to live-action. Akira is a gorgeous film, rendered in beautiful detail through hand drawn animation. Neo-Tokyo, reminiscent of the dystopian Los Angeles in *Blade Runner*, is full of vibrant neon colours and ground level grime. It's Ôtomo's eye for detail and visual acuity, honed through his work on comics, which really sets it apart and puts Akira in another level. The soundtrack by Shôji Yamashiro is one of cinema's most underrated and overlooked, with its complex layering of instruments and voices that adds to the tone and feeling of the film.

Akira feeds off Japan's history with the destruction from the atomic bomb, and Akira and Tetsuo both have

powers that reflect its city-levelling destruction. Woven into this are government conspiracies and power struggles and a disaffected youth and population, with several revolutionary and religious groups who are barely held back by the violent hand of the army. But, within it all, the film never loses sight of its main thrust, the friendship and struggles of two friends, Tetsuo and Kaneda, and it is their bond and arc that is the heart of Akira.

A classic of the animated form, Akira should be seen by all film fans.

Extras: Three featurettes / Akira sound clip // Director interview / Storyboard collection / Original trailers / U.S. 2013 Trailer / Original commercials / Glossary / Art cards / Bonus DVD

COURTNEY BUTTON

★★★★★★★★★10

STARBURST

ANIME



THE PERFECT INSIDER - COMPLETE SEASON COLLECTION

DUAL / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: MAMORU KANBE / SCREENPLAY: TOSHIYA OONO / STARRING: ATSUMI TANEZAKI, IBUKI KIDO, YASUYUKI KASE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In *The Perfect Insider*, a programming genius is murdered in a locked room in her research base. Visiting architecture professor Souhei Saikawa takes it upon himself to solve the case and learn what it has to do with the death of the victim's parents, which occurred

fifteen years prior.

The Perfect Insider is a rather sombre affair. It is a detective story, and much like a detective it handles its subject in a slow and methodical manner. There is some humour but the focus is mostly on reflection, and on building

a tense atmosphere that highlights the danger that the main characters are in. Unlike many mystery shows, there is only one mystery across the eleven episodes. This gives the characters space to breathe and allows for more contemplative moments that might not have happened had the show been in a rush to wrap up the mystery. Professor Saikawa's assistant Moe Nishinosono is an example of this.

In murder mysteries in which the crime is solved by a duo, the junior partner is often made to appear dim or ineffectual to make the genius of the main hero all the more apparent. This was a fate that briefly befell Sherlock Holmes character John Watson before it was reversed by more recent adaptations. Luckily for Nishinosono, this is a fate that she avoids. The character is clearly junior to the professor but she is a maths genius and has her own skills. The fact that the murder is solved by her professor is shown as being down to his advantages in experience rather than any ineptitude on her part.

The character of Shiki Magata is already dead for most of the show, so a lot of what

the audience learns about her is relayed through flashbacks. This includes the death of her parents. Shiki Magata was suspected of killing them and it is through these flashbacks we see if that was true, and why they died. These flashbacks are integrated well with the main plot and give the viewers an understanding they wouldn't have had without them.

The Perfect Insider is a tense murder mystery with enough twists and turns to keep the intrigue going over the eleven episodes. The motivations of the killer and their victim could have been dwelled on a bit more for some extra clarity but this feels like an anime that wants to contemplate the actions of the characters rather than merely explain them to you. For the most part, the show uses its time well. This is an anime for someone looking for a slow, reflective show that takes its time in explaining its message.

Extras: Clean opening and closing animations

GARETH EVANS

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



DEATH NOTE: COMPLETE SERIES AND OVA COLLECTION

BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: TETSURŌ ARAKI / WRITTEN BY: TSUGUMI OHBA / STARRING: MAMORU MIYANO, BRAD SWAILE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

If you haven't come across *Death Note* before now, it might be time to investigate. The 2006 anime based on Tsugumi Ohba's Manga was a huge success in Japan and has achieved cult status the world over, even ending up on Adult Swim and Netflix, becoming one of the first Anime to do so.

Basically, *Death Note* follows the story of Light

Yagami, an intelligent high school student who stumbles across a notebook capable of killing anyone whose name is written in it. Ryuk, the Shinigami (Japanese God of Death) who dropped the notebook, is then tethered to Light, though unseen by anyone but him.

It's a show crammed with cliff-hangers and conundrums, wrapped up in

a surprisingly conversational mix of supernatural drama and thriller touches. Much of the fun comes from how well structured the rules of the notebook are. *Death Note* is nothing if not a surprisingly flexible concept, even with its tight rules. Every few episodes it introduces a new idea or character and a whole new set of issues erupt out of nowhere. L, the mysterious private investigator hunting an increasingly petulant Light, is a wonderful creation and an important part of the show's constant evolution. The bad thing about all this one-uppery is that the last act of the show can feel strained in its desperation to keep us guessing.

Still, its riveting stuff built on a solid foundation: an ace hero/villain relationship and a fundamentally enticing concept. Ryuk is just as intriguing as L or even Light, and the show's strengths come from a bold and uncanny world, beautifully personified in a sloppy, inquisitive, but ultimately dangerous demonic entity who acts increasingly like Mads Mikkelsen's Hannibal. Some of the most interesting and revealing parts of the show

come from Ryuk's investigation of the human world, and adventures back to his own Lovecraftian otherworld.

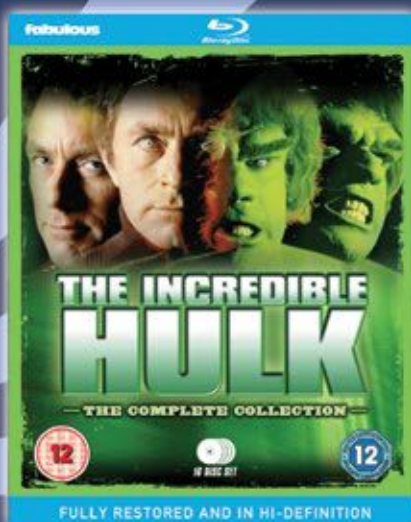
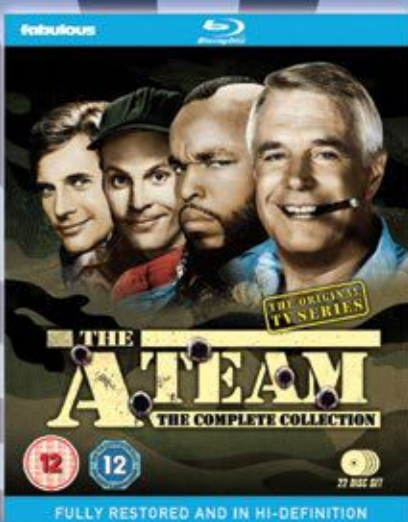
There's something nicely grandiose about the whole thing though, as it plays out like a Shakespearean comedy rather than a horror-tinged supernatural thriller. It's over-the-top, smart, and often silly. It's a credit to the writing that so many of the deaths carry enormous weight, and an uncanny achievement that its heart and soul comes from a mass-murdering teenager's friendship with a God of Death. In some ways, *Death Note* could be a good fantastical fall-back if you're all caught up with *Fargo* - it is after all a story characterised by farce, death, and dangerous acquaintances.

Death Note is an easy thing to recommend because it's honestly that good. Sure, it goes a bit unruly towards its last act, but for the most part it's a nicely conceived, well paced thriller with some really great back-up lore.

SCOTT CLARK

★★★★★★★★★★ 8

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COSPLAY CATWALK

A MONTHLY
FOCUS ON
THE COSTUMED
ROLE-PLAY SCENE AT
FAN CONVENTIONS
AROUND THE WORLD



Credit: Richard Giddings



Credit: Stuart Runham

KUROI CHI COSPLAY

STARBURST profiles Ina Martin, another passionate convention costumer...

STARBURST: How did you get started with cosplaying?

Ina Martin: I started cosplaying in May 2014, and my first cosplay was L from **Death Note** at MCM London. I had been aware of the concept of cosplaying for quite a while, but had never thought I could actually do it myself, because my face has quite an unusual shape. Finally, though, I decided to give it a go (I can't remember exactly what gave me the final push), and to my surprise and joy, I discovered I suit quite a few of my favourite characters, and the list is constantly growing. To date, I have cosplayed 13 characters - 7 male and 6 female. I must admit I normally enjoy more cosplaying male characters, maybe it's because of the novelty of it. One thing I find is that even though I have a rather petite build, it seems to mysteriously expand when

I wear a compression vest, and it can be tricky to create a convincing male look. I think I have it more or less sussed out now, although there was one occasion where I put the vest on the widest setting without realising, and then wondered why it had gone so loose. Well, I learnt my lesson after that and now always double-check that it is on the tightest setting!

Who is your favourite character to dress as?

I feel I need to have an emotional connection with a character in order to cosplay them, so I love all characters I have dressed up as, but I guess Shiki from **Togainu no Chi** and Michael Jackson are that little bit extra special, because Shiki was my first favourite character from an anime, and I have been a fan of Michael since I was seven years old (he was my very first idol). They are also

two cosplays I never thought I could pull off successfully, which meant I was insanely happy when I did them and realised that, in fact, I could.

How long do you spend making the costumes and how much do you usually budget for?

It usually takes me quite a while to put a cosplay together, so I tend to start well in advance and build it bit by bit. My Bellatrix Lestrange dress took around a month and a half to do from start to finish (but that's not accounting for redoing the sleeves later, as I found they were a little too short). It was the first (and only so far) cosplay I made entirely from scratch, and I'm still very happy with the result. The budget varies a lot, I usually try to get things as cheap as I can, but for my Shiki cosplay, I decided that I wanted

to do it right, no matter how much it cost! I believe the total was over £200 in the end, but it was well worth it. I ordered the outfit from eBay, but when it came I had to scrap the belt and gloves, as they were awful. I made my own instead, and I'm still very proud with the belt, since it was the first cosplay accessory I ever made. Bellatrix was probably the next most expensive one, because the fabric for the dress was £17 a metre, and a couple of the rings were on the pricey side, so I'd say it wasn't far off the £200 mark as well. Most of my other cosplays were fairly cheap, under or around £50, I believe, with some good second-hand finds from eBay. I tend to get all my cosplay shoes second-hand, because most of the time they are used solely for cosplay (though sometimes getting the perfect shoes/boots means very sore feet after the convention).

What costumes do you have planned for the future?

My next cosplay will be Katsuki Yuri from **Yuri!!! On Ice** in February with my partner in crime Axel Macabre, who's been my Akira (**Togainu no Chi**), Soubi (**Loveless**) and Shion (**No.6**) so far. After that I have a few long-term projects - Undertaker from **Black Butler**, Willy Wonka from **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory** (Depp version), Elizabeth Bennet from **Pride and Prejudice** (hopefully with a group), Trinity from **The Matrix** and Nymphadora Tonks from **Harry Potter**.

Check out more from Ina at facebook.com/KuroiChiCosplay.

Words: Martin Unsworth



Credit: Paul Martin

READER'S COSPLAY "THAT COSPLAY COUPLE"



This month, we throw the spotlight on a couple who cosplay together...

STABURST: How did you get started with cosplaying?

Dan: We've both been collecting comic books and into films from a young age and when we started dating we said "let's do a convention, then" our first convention was one in London, May 2013 where we went as Rocket Raccoon and Groot from **Guardians of the Galaxy** before the film had come out. We've attended every London convention since.

Any plans for the future?

We've just started planning this year's costumes and Rachel has just finished the **Bioshock** video games, so we are thinking of a few from there as well as making costumes from some of our favourite horror movies for later in the year.

You can find out more about Dan and Rachel at facebook.com/thatcosplaycouple.

Words: Martin Unsworth

Who are your favourite characters to dress as?

We do a lot of variations of the Joker and Harley Quinn because they are fun to dress as, but we only choose costumes where the characters mean something to us. Harley Quinn is a strong character and very empowering.

How long do you spend making the costumes and how much do you usually budget for?

We tend to spend about 2-3 months on a costume after a few months of planning what we wear and our budget is usually £250 because of materials, wigs, and accessories if we need them.

What's the best part of being a cosplaying couple?

It's made us stronger as a couple, we understand how each other works on the projects and can split jobs to each other's strengths, and we have a lot of fun together at conventions.



JL JUSTINE-LOUISE PHOTOGRAPHY

PIXEL JUICE

NEWS AND PREVIEWS
IN GAMING
BY LEE PRICE



DOUBLE DRAGON 4 is Coming

There aren't a whole lot of details circulating around this one at the moment, but by the time you have this magazine in your hands, **Double Dragon 4** should be on a PC or PS4 near you.

Arc System Works, who bought the franchise back in 2015, announced that they would be releasing the game in January, which is massive news for fans of the originals. The teaser trailer looks amazing and it is great to see that Arc has brought back both Takaomi Kaneko and Yoshihisa Kishimoto, who were instrumental to the creation of the first.

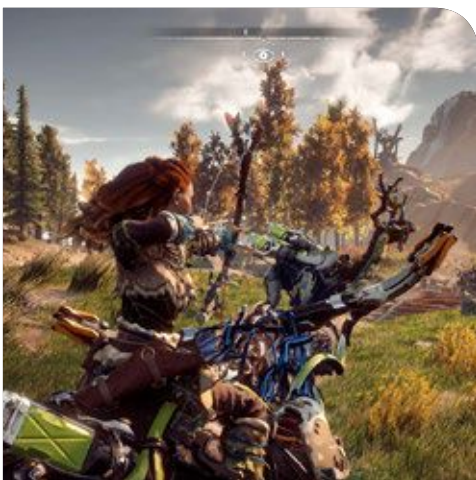
The game also looks to have both a story and a two-player dual mode, meaning it should really harken back to the days of the revolutionary original.

Valve Hit with Fine

Valve – who we know as the company that still hasn't given us **Half-Life 3** – has been stung with a pretty big fine in Australia over the lack of a proper refund policy.

The company, which makes the Steam platform available to all, actually has a pretty great return policy right now. However, the lawsuit actually refers to the company's policy in the earlier days of Steam. The maximum fine of \$3 million was imposed, in part, because of the company's apparent complete lack of interest in Australian law. It shouldn't be too much of an issue for the company to cover but it's still something that nobody wants to pay.

COMING SOON



HORIZON ZERO DAWN

PLATFORM: PS4

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 1ST

With a premise that sees the player take control of a hunter/gatherer in a world that is overrun by robots, Horizon Zero Dawn offers an interesting take on open-world action and survival mechanics.

At its heart, the game appears to be a fairly simple Western RPG, in that other characters give you side missions to accomplish while you work through the main story, but it's the combat here that really excels. Anybody who has seen the E3 and trailer videos should know how hectic the fighting is and this is a game to really look forward to.

COMING SOON



NIER: AUTOMATA

PLATFORM: PS4, PC

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 10TH

Platinum Games' most recent effort offers a fairly similar premise to another of this month's big hitters – Horizon Zero Dawn – at least in regards to having humanity battling against sentient machines. However, in this case the machines have come from another planet. Expect the exceptional combat mechanics that Platinum has become known for developing, alongside more than a sprinkling of traditional RPG fare. The company rarely disappoints, so expect this to be something of a sleeper hit and eventual cult favourite.

SUPER MARIO RUN is a Hit

Nintendo really seem to have landed on their feet with mobile games following the relative disappointment of the Nintendo Wii U. We all know how massive **Pokémon Go** became in a very short period of time, but their latest mobile game – **Super Mario Run** – is certainly not far behind.

Despite only being released on Apple devices, the game has managed to rack up a rather astonishing 40 million downloads within the first four days of its release. It also managed to pull in \$14 million within its first three days.

It's likely that those numbers will be higher by the time that you're reading this and it can't be considered anything other than a massive success for the company. Better yet, pre-registration for the game is now being offered on Android devices, which means Nintendo are onto an even bigger winner.

Of course, it also raises worries that Nintendo will start focusing more on mobile than they do traditional games, especially given their predilection for the casual market, but with the Switch on the way that should hopefully not become a concern anytime soon.



MEGAMAN 1-6 Heading to a Mobile Near You!

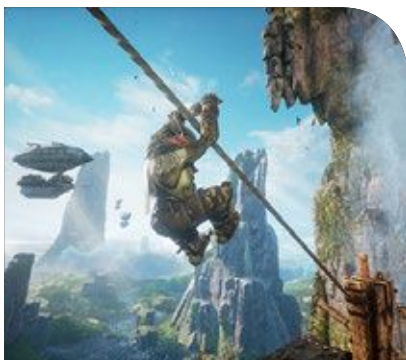
Retro gamers will be delighted this month, as Capcom has officially announced that the first six **Megaman** titles are going to be released on mobile devices. They may already be out by the time you're reading this, but it is still pretty big news for gamers.

Kuma and Panda Will be in TEKKEN 7

It's been a long time since **Tekken 6**, which means anticipation for the latest game in the series is really starting to build.

Happily, a recent trailer has shown that series mainstays and fan favourites Kuma and Panda are likely going to be putting in appearances in the game.

COMING SOON



STYX: SHARDS OF DARKNESS

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PC
RELEASE DATE: MARCH 14TH

The original Styx was a fairly middling stealth game that saw the player take control of Styx, who is the first goblin, as he attempts to steal the heart of a World Tree. It was fun but didn't really bring a whole lot new to the genre. The sequel, on the other hand, is being built with a much larger budget. This may not affect the gameplay too much, which was fairly solid, but it should hopefully mean that the world Styx explores this time around is much more engaging and interesting, rather than being limited to the castle environments that took up the majority of Master of Shadows.

COMING SOON



STAR TREK: BRIDGE CREW VR

PLATFORM: PC, PS4

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 14TH

There's not a whole lot to be said for the games we have seen on the PlayStation VR so far. Limited gameplay seems to be the order of the day, as developers focus on getting to grips with the tech more than creating gaming experiences that can engage with anything bar their visuals. Bridge Crew is unlikely to change that, but that doesn't mean it won't hold some interest for fans of the series. After all, what's not to love about a game that actually places you into the world of Star Trek in a way that few others have even attempted?

Former Konami President Moves to Kojima Productions

Can we all just get to a point where we consider Kojima Productions to be the actual Konami now, as the real thing really doesn't seem to want the job?

Shinji Hirano, who is the former President of Konami Europe, has updated his LinkedIn profile to state that he is now the President of Kojima Productions. Hirano suffered a fall from grace within Konami that somewhat mirrors that of Hideo Kojima himself, as he was demoted constantly from his role as President to the point that he was just a 'Corporate Officer' by the time he decided to throw in the towel in early-2016.

There is clearly a lot of trust between the two for Hirano to be made President right off the bat. This situation almost feels like the formation of Treasure in a way. That company was a splinter developer made of former Konami developers that went on to achieve greatness. Is Kojima Productions heading the same way?

RESIDENT EVIL 7 Producer Talks

Resident Evil 7 is really shaping up to be the shot in the arm that the series has needed ever since **Resi 4** introduced all of the action aspects that caused the massive change in direction, which has led to the series to near-mediocrity since - despite **Resi 4** being a stellar game.

Still, it's good to know that the game will still offer plenty for fans of the series to be excited about. Producer Masachika Kawata recently told reporters, "At first glance, it may not seem like it, but this title will offer plenty of familiar aspects of **Resident Evil**, from fighting against different creatures to tense, atmospheric exploration and solving various puzzles."

He also made mention of some 'subtle nods' throughout the game that fans of the series will be able to pick up on. It's a brave new world for **Resident Evil**, but it's good to know that the game knows where it comes from, as well as where it wants to go.

Wii U Version of LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD Possibly Cancelled

While nothing has been confirmed at the time of writing, it should come as no real surprise that Nintendo has likely cancelled the Wii U version of **The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild**.

The ailing console is on its last legs, especially with the Switch coming out fairly soon, and it's unlikely that offering players another **Zelda** title is going to do anything to boost sales. This is likely going to prove to be a good move for Nintendo, as it gives them a killer app for their new console practically right off the bat.



THE LAST OF US 2 Announced

Massive news from Sony and Naughty Dog, as the two companies used the PlayStation Experience 2016 event to announce that a sequel to **The Last of Us** is on its way.

The original game is often brought up in arguments about the best game of the last generation of consoles and many see it as having a legitimate shout for being one of the best games of all time, especially when it comes to narrative and complexity.

Not much is known about the sequel outside of the trailer. We do know that Ellie is going to be the primary focus of the game, with Joel playing some sort of second fiddle. A Firefly symbol has also been seen in the trailer, suggesting that they are going to be playing a major role.

Early theories suggest that Ellie may be on the hunt for other Firefly members, but if that's the case, how much of that hunt is built on the lie Joel told her at the end of the first game? Of course, it may go in a completely different direction entirely.

Whatever the case, it is one to get really excited for, and that's without even mentioning the announcement of **Uncharted: The Lost Legacy**.

COMING SOON



MASS EFFECT: ANDROMEDA

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PC

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 23RD

Anybody who tries to claim that this isn't the biggest release in March is lying to themselves. It's been a long time since the story of Commander Shepherd and crew concluded - no matter how anticlimactic that may have felt - and *Andromeda* will see us following an entirely new story. The *Mass Effect* trilogy is one of the best that has ever been created, so *Andromeda* has pretty massive shoes to fill. Still, with the power of next-gen consoles at its mercy, we have to feel excited for what the latest chapter in *Mass Effect* has to offer.

COMING SOON



SOUTH PARK: THE FRACTURED BUT WHOLE

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PC

RELEASE DATE: MARCH 31ST

Punny title aside, The Fractured But Whole has a pretty tall task in front of it if it is to scale the heights of The Stick of Truth. The last South Park game was a real revelation, offering tons of fan service and being an excellent game in its own right. In this game, the South Park crew - along with the New Guy - set out to become role-playing superheroes. The inevitable falling out in the group happens, leading to a face-off between Cartman's Coon and Friends and the Freedom Pals. Hopefully, it's as good as The Stick of Truth was.

PS4 Continues to Sell Strongly

A recent report has revealed that the PS4 has now sold over 50 million units as of December 2016. The feat has been accomplished in a little over three years and is certainly one for the company to celebrate.

This has also made the PS4 the fastest selling Sony console ever produced, topping even the mammoth sales figures of the PS2. If the trend continues, we may see the PS4 breaking the record for most sales ever for a console by the time its run has concluded.

Telltale Announce GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY Game

It wouldn't be an edition of Pixel Juice without some sort of update on what Telltale is doing. This is a pretty big one though, so we are sure you can forgive us.

Telltale teamed up with Marvel way back in 2015 to create an unannounced game, but now we know what it is going to be: **Guardians of the Galaxy** is making its way to consoles and PCs.

The game is going to follow the familiar route of having five episodes in a series and both Telltale and Marvel have been quick to emphasise the focus on storytelling and humour in their press releases.

Hopefully, this will manage to scale the dizzy heights of **The Walking Dead** and other Telltale classics.



DEVELOPER: TEAM ICO / PUBLISHER: SONY INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT / PLATFORM: PS4 / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Fans of Team Ico's past works will certainly still enjoy this, but there's no denying it lacks the punch many wanted. Those after an innovative open world puzzle experience or hungering for a Shadow of the Colossus experience will certainly get a kick out of this, but it won't be anywhere near as sweet as you might expect. It might tug at your heartstrings, but this is by no means this developer's opus.

★★★★★★ 6



WARHAMMER 40,000: SPACE HULK - DEATHWING

DEVELOPER: STERUM ON STUDIO / PUBLISHER: FOCUS HOME INTERACTIVE / PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PC / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

There have been few games over the past year stranger than Space Hulk – Deathwing. While this is a clear labour of love, with a staggering level of detail, a solid story and one of the best examples of M41's grim, dark atmosphere to date, what is clearly a fantastic game is hidden behind a brick wall of bugs, coding errors and poor platform optimisation.

The story is largely what you would expect if you have played any Space Hulk game to date: a mishmash of ancient warships has emerged from the hellish realm of the Warp, spat back out as a twisted amalgamation of various vessels, and it's the job of the Adeptus Astartes to secure the relics within. It's direct and uncomplicated, but a wealth of cutscenes and voice actors delivering the most bombastic performances on the planet adds a bit more depth to things this time around.

The history and design of the vessels you visit is also staggeringly well presented, as you will find yourself fighting your way through the bowels of a Mechanicum vessel and aboard a Black Templars warship. Everything from the overt cathedrals of a battle barge to minor details such as personal reliquaries or workstations tells a story, and their design largely sidesteps the risk of this becoming a glorified corridor shooter. Even as you cave in the skulls of a few hundred xenos hybrids, it's hard not to admire the effort put into the level design.

The core combat also proves to be relatively solid, if somewhat methodically mechanical. While typical Space Hulk games are careful affairs of turn-based planning, this is more akin to SWAT 4. You order your units to move about, hold down objectives, seal doors and repair armour as you advance forwards, always

keeping an eye open for alien threats. Yet, unlike that game, you can take your fair share of hits, and dish it out in return with an exceptionally broad variety of melee and ranged weapons. These range from plasma cannons to the old fashioned storm bolter, with even a few psychic powers to call upon. While certainly basic in some regards, it nevertheless relays the sheer intensity of combat. You are always outnumbered, and always on the verge of feeling as if you are about to lose despite your sheer power, which makes every victory all the sweeter.

Such strengths serve as a solid basis for a great game. Unfortunately, everything else here is such a chaotic mess that it borders upon heresy.

For starters, the feedback to the player and certain UI aspects are rough, practically unfinished, even. While a new artefact or item might boost your personal durability by 10%, it never offers you an exact stat to work from. This is something further hampered by a surprising number of typos and outright false details, both in the flavour text and basic statistics, meaning you can never fully rely upon the information you're given. This sort of thing would likely lead you to an early grave, were it not for the poor AI of your allies and foes, both of whom you can often find running headlong into gunfire and walls alike.

Yet even if you can stomach such flaws, the game is so poorly finished that it might as well be a rough tech demo. The framerate will drop to near nothing with the slightest sign of activity, and the core game crashes like there is no tomorrow. You will often find yourself stuck on unending loading screens, struggling with doors that won't open

and even guns that cannot fire. Certain prompts will fail to trigger and more than once the elite First Company veterans will unload clip after clip into a nearby wall, detecting a foe somewhere on the other side. At times it reaches Gearbox levels of ineptitude, and any comparison with Aliens: Colonial Marines in regards to bugs is well warranted.

If this were finished, it would be the best game Warhammer has seen since Battlefleet Gothic: Armada, easily scoring seven on here. It is a joy to let loose with an assault cannon and its hectic fun can easily rival Vermintide, but its shortcomings cannot be overlooked. Wait a few months and then get back to this one after a few patches, but for the moment, stick to Space Hulk: Ascension for your 40,000 fix.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 3





THE DWARVES

DEVELOPER: KING ART / PUBLISHER: EUROVIDEO MEDIEN /
PLATFORMS: PC, OSX, PS4, XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

On the list of woefully underappreciated developers, KING Art Games has to be somewhere near the top. Responsible for some of the best point-and-click experiences of the last decade, the developer has churned out hit after hit without ever quite earning the recognition they deserve. The Dwarves is their first foray into the Tactical RPG genre, and it proves to be a promising start for a group best known for slow pacing or turn-based games.

Adapted from the books

of the same name by Markus Heitz, the game is set in a high fantasy realm beset by undead forces. Often subverting many of the old expected tropes as much as it celebrates them, the story served as an examination of the many baseline fantasy ideas established by Tolkien. In this regard, this video game remains a success, adapting the tale with an astonishing degree of loyalty, and brought to life by an incredibly talented ensemble of voice actors.

It helps that, despite the

large and varied number of characters, each of them remains distinct and with a very clear role in the world. There's no third wheel present there which you know could have easily been ditched, and even when they fall into the same general character archetype it's often to help present a different facet of the world. It also helps that, along with being well told, said world is beautifully animated and backed by an incredible score, meaning backtracking or delays rarely ever feel like needless busywork. On the whole, players who tend to prioritise lore and presentation will definitely get a kick out of playing The Dwarves.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the core combat, where the game is roughest around the edges. It's also where most of the bugs appear. The basic idea is solid, mixing RTS and turn-based RPG mechanics into a single experience, and the crowd control system features a number of quite innovative ideas; especially in regards to pushing through enemy swarms.

However, while it avoids the usual "death by a thousand cuts" approach to mob combat, its limitations are always clear. The camera angles can be frequently intrusive and problematic, and it will be the bane of your existence

during the mid-game areas. In addition, the companion AI is utterly braindead, which combined with the surprisingly awkward collision detection leaves you micromanaging many fights. The Dwarves might have been even able to get away with this, were it not for the fact you're constantly fighting an uphill battle and friendly fire is an ever-present risk, where your party can easily end up killing one another in the crossfire. It's a damnable shame as well, given the equipment and skill system itself is excellently designed despite a few interface issues, and the variety of skills on hand is perfect for tailor-making a range of varied formations.

There are good ideas here, and when you actually get beyond the fights themselves, The Dwarves is a joy to behold. However, as this is an RPG, combat is a key part of the game and the errors present drag down what could have easily been an outstanding new release. If you are willing to stomach problematic mechanics for good storytelling, give this one a look. Just be warned that you're going to have to stomach a lot of bad to reach the good bits.

CALLUM SHEPHARD

★★★★★★★★★★ 6



THE WALKING DEAD: ALL OUT WAR MINIATURES GAME

PUBLISHER: MANTIC / DESIGNER: MARK LATHAM / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Zombies plague the modern age. The success of the TV show The Walking Dead has meant that shambling corpses are everywhere. The number of zombie-related comics, books, shows and games seems relentless and unkillable. So much so that a zombie-themed game has to be pretty remarkable in order to do well in today's over-

crowded market.

Mantic's The Walking Dead: All Out War Miniatures Game is an interesting take on the genre. Firstly, it's a small team miniatures skirmish game, in which both sides play human factions. The titular walking dead are a central hazard. The more noise and nonsense you get up to on your turn, the more likely it

is for things to escalate with the walking dead. Toward the end of each turn, you draw a card and that tells you how much of a threat the zombies are. Various characters can make matters better or worse, depending on your strategy.

The main goal of the survivors is to get through the day without being killed and also scavenge equipment. Unluckily, all the places worth searching are crawling with the walking dead. In the two-player mode, you are racing against the other faction to get the most loot and run away. Specific scenarios are also available, and the game has a solo mode for those of you with no friends.

The rules are quite simple, and the components (dice, cards, counters) make it easy to keep track of the few rules the game has. The 'threat dial' is particularly handy as it helps you track how scary the zombies are getting.

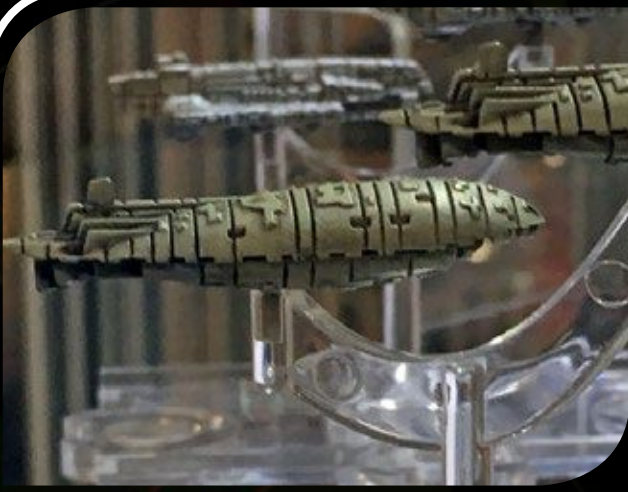
The models are of the high standard we've come to expect

from Mantic and the dead themselves look great. The license is based on the comic book (rather than the TV series) so the survivors look more like characters from the comics. The rulebook (and general game art) also draws from the comics, so it looks appropriately scary and pretty lovely. The counters and cards also look great. The game does come with a 'playmat', which doesn't look great but is meant to be a freebie; you don't need the mat to play the game. The models are easy to assemble and you can play the game pretty much out of the box.

This is a slick, fast to play game that will appeal to those who love games like Necromunda and Zombicide. It's very replayable, it's easy to pick up and it lets you re-enact bits from an iconic comic book and TV show. In short, it's a lot of fun.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★★ 9



STAR WARS ARMADA: WAVE 3 AND 4

DESIGNER: JAMES KNIFFEN, CHRISTIAN T. PETERSEN / PUBLISHER: FANTASY FLIGHT GAMES / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Fantasy Flight's massive space war game Star Wars Armada, is designed to emulate the epic battles of the Star Wars movies. After the wow factor of the initial starter set, fans grew concerned that the game might run out of enormous things for Star Destroyers to blow up.

Would a game focused on a specific sort of conflict, tied to a specific franchise, work? The answer appears to be a resounding yes. The two most recent expansions (wave 3 and 4) focused solely on providing interesting spaceships and fresh new tactics. Wave 3

brought what may sound like an unexciting element to the game, transport ships.

The Imperials get Gozanti-class cruiser, a relatively slow but powerful transport that can really shift it when under fire and is well armoured. It's okay as an anti-fighter ship as well. The various extra add-ons the ship comes with give you lots of options to slow Rebel fighters down, from slicer tools (which let you hack any ship commands) to the notorious Agent Kallus (one of the baddies from Star Wars Rebels). It works reasonably well as a bomber command centre, letting you get the most out of those breakable TIE Bombers in your fleet. The Rebel equivalent, the GR-75, does pretty much the same sort of thing but with less style.

Wave 4 comes with a much needed big ship for the Rebels. Firstly, the MC80 Liberty type Star Cruiser is a gorgeous-looking model. It's also very Rebel-looking (lots of curves and colours). The piece is well painted and looks like a pointy shard of doom. It's also as big as a Star Destroyer, which is always fun.

The add-ons included allows you to turn it into a cannon-laden defence machine, or a desperate last measure-style weapon of carnage. In play, it's still going to get torn up by the superior firepower of the Imperials, but it has the punch to tear apart the dark side fleet before that happens.

The Imperials get the equally impressive Interdictor. That's the Star Destroyer with the weird bumps on it that you have seen. The ship comes equipped with Grav Well generators and crazy powerful tractor beams, which down the nippy Rebels slows to a crawl. It's a bruiser of a cruiser that allows you to control the field of play like a pro.

Overall, the new waves of models for Star Wars Armada show that the game is going to continue to grow and innovate. As a strategy game, there's plenty room for new tactics and ideas, and Armada looks set to be around for a long time to come.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



HALO GROUND COMMAND - BATTLE FOR REACH

DESIGN: NEIL FAWCETT, DEREK SINCLAIR / ARTISTS: JONATHAN LA TROBE-LEWIS, CHRISTOPHER PEACEY / PUBLISHER: SPARTAN GAMES / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Halo is an interesting franchise. The space war series is best known for the seemingly endless range of video games, in which one sole super-soldier takes on a horde of alien villains. 343 Industries, the people behind the games, has made sure that it's a proper franchise. There are books, movies, toys and comics based in the world of this militaristic future. With Halo Ground Command, there is now a table-top wargame.

This is a very traditional miniatures wargame in style. None of the models are pre-prepared, and they have to be assembled and painted. The bulk of the models are made from pewter, with the bases and vehicles being cast out of resin. Both the Warthog and Ghost vehicles look ace and are fun to paint. The scenery provided includes two thick plastic bunkers with cardboard decals, as well as assorted crates and obstacles. The core

set is designed as a starter, so it comes with plenty of pieces for both the UNSC and Covenant forces. This is a 1/100th (aka 15mm) scale game; the pieces look nothing like other space games out there and the different scale adds to the unique feel of the game. With plenty of models and scenery, it becomes quite easy to emulate the 'full scale war' feel of the franchise.

Gameplay-wise, this is a rapid, easy to pick up battle game. It works easily as a small skirmish game, but it doesn't slow down as you add models. Pieces are split into battle groups, so designing your force at the start is a game in its own right. You're essentially fielding squads of troops, ducking and dashing across the board to achieve their objective. Meanwhile, the super soldiers on both sides stride across the table like gods of war, battering the heck out of each other.

One of the innovations is that rather than the traditional "I go, you go" turn order you normally find in these games, there's a 'reaction' rule that allows you to interrupt an action. It requires a skill roll, and if you fail, you waste an action. Succeed and you

get the jump on the enemy. This changes the strategy substantially. Much of the UNSC game depends on correctly using your Spartan super trooper correctly. Much like the video game, the Spartans are the heroes.

Like its space-ship combat sister game, Halo Fleet Battles, this is a slickly designed game with custom dice and solid counters. It's very much a wargamer's game though; if you like modelling and painting, then you'll love the value and quality of this set. It's also a strong introduction to this sort of gaming for those who like their future space war with a very specific flavour.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★★ 9



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RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT
THE WORLD OF
RETRO GAMING
WITH SEAN ONLY



METROIDVANIA-MANIA

Metroidvania', for the uninitiated, is a genre of videogames and a portmanteau of *Metroid* and *Castlevania*. The term was coined after the release of *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* in 1997, although it was *Metroid* and its 16-bit successor *Super Metroid* that established all the gameplay mechanics and tropes associated with the genre.

The basic premise for these types of games is fairly simple – 2D side-scrolling action over an ever-expanding and interlinking map (or maps). Exploration is key, but many areas will be inaccessible until the relevant item or power is discovered, thus making upgrading abilities of equal importance... Okay, maybe it's not that simple.

Despite the fact that today's gaming market is dominated by Triple-A titles with increasing budgets and star power, Metroidvania is currently more popular and in demand than ever. In recent years, we've had titles such as *Shadow Complex* (2009), *Outland* (2011), *Strider* (2014) and the absolutely breathtaking *Ori and the Blind Forest* (2015), to name but a few. While it's true these games have been predominantly download-only, the success they've enjoyed is undeniable.

Now that's all well and good, but this is **Retro Bytes** and we're not here to chat about modern things from 'now times'. We're here to chat about retro things from retro times that give us a warm, fuzzy, nostalgic feeling in our stomachs. It may be the case that the fuzzy feeling is

trapped wind, but today we'll be looking back at some of the games that defined the genre, so let's carry on regardless.

SUPER METROID

The third game in the series, *Super Metroid* (released exclusively for the SNES in 1994) took the format and ideas from the first two games and improved on them exponentially. While *Metroid* (and its Game Boy sequel – 1991's *Metroid II: Return of Samus*) were highly praised and lauded for their innovative, non-linear,

exploration-based gameplay, the lack of a map and an inventory screen were frequent criticisms. As well as adding both of these things (in addition to the concept of 'automapping'), *Super Metroid* also gave central protagonist Samus the ability to fire her primary weapon in multiple directions. These new elements, combined with an extremely atmospheric soundtrack, vastly improved graphics, some mighty impressive boss battles and a few great early examples of set pieces turned a great game concept into an all-time classic. The heavily H.R. Giger/*Alien*-inspired enemies and level design are still here, but the tension has been dramatically increased, almost giving the game an early survival horror vibe at times. *Super Metroid* is frequently cited as one of the best games in the entire SNES library and one of the greatest games of all time. It's difficult to understate its influence when you consider that all Metroidvania games that followed took their early cues almost entirely from this game.

TODD'S ADVENTURES IN SLIME WORLD

Released in 1990 for the Atari Lynx (although there was a notoriously mad Mega Drive/Genesis port a year or so later), *Todd's Adventures in Slime World* is the epitome of a hidden gem. It has been all but forgotten over time (partially due to the Lynx's relative obscurity) and was never a huge blockbuster hit, but Todd and his little slimy chum's first (and only) foray into video games was incredibly ahead of



its time – particularly given the limitations of the handheld system it was originally released on.

Players take control of the eponymous Todd as he is dumped unceremoniously into a world made almost entirely of (you guessed it) slime. With no instruction or direction, players must navigate the harsh (and somewhat disgusting) terrain in the hopes of finding an exit. Slime drips from the walls, ceilings, and enemies and if Todd gets completely covered in the green goop, he dies. Luckily, there are small pools of water scattered throughout the environment for Todd to submerge himself in and wash off the nasty gunk.

Probably the most impressive thing about *TAISW* is the fact it utilises a map system. *Super Metroid* seems to get the credit for this innovation, but Todd actually beat Samus to the punch by several years! While it may not be for everyone (clunky and occasionally sluggish controls may be a bugbear for some), the historical significance of *TAISW* means it should definitely be checked out by fans of the genre.

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

Castlevania: Symphony of the Night was initially exclusively released for Sony's PlayStation console in 1997, before being ported to the Sega Saturn the following year. Players take control of Dracula's half-vampire/half-human son Alucard on a mission to destroy the evil that lies within his father's castle and ultimately vanquish Dracula himself.

Gameplay took a dramatic shift away from the regular action platform style traditionally associated with the Castlevania franchise, instead adopting a *Metroid*-inspired exploration-based system with heavy RPG elements. Enigmatic co-writer/director and brains behind the operation Koji Igarashi has said he wanted to create a game that players could enjoy for a long time and a world that people would still be discovering secrets in years after the



game's release. It's fair to say he was successful. The sheer scale of the castle and the depth of gameplay is extremely impressive (and a little daunting at first). You'd be forgiven for reaching the final boss without discovering a fraction of the secrets hidden within the castles many and varied areas. Then there's the fact that the supposed 'final boss' isn't really the final boss at all and there's a whole other upside down castle to explore!

It's with good reason that *SOTN* has gone down in gaming folklore as one of the most influential, atmospheric, inventive and all-round greatest games ever made. But if all that gameplay wasn't enough, an eclectic mix of various types of metal, jazz, dance, and classical music makes the award-winning soundtrack just as memorable as the game itself. The nice people at Konami have even ported it to the PlayStation Network and Xbox Live in recent years, so it's become super easy to track down. To call this game a 'must play' would be an understatement.

CAVE STORY

Released in 2004 as a freeware game, *Cave Story* is the most recent game we're going to be looking at today. Being a mere twelve years old (at time of writing), it only just qualifies as a retro game, but graphically and stylistically it couldn't get much more retro.

The plot for *Cave Story* is utterly barmy, incredibly convoluted and somewhat confusing, but at the same time, strangely captivating. It's all a bit much to explain here, but the long and the short of it is: you're a robot that's lost his memory, trapped in the interior of an island populated by overgrown, sentient, murderous rabbit-like creatures. The objective is to explore, upgrade, solve puzzles and fight countless enemies while enroute to defeating an evil doctor intent on taking over the world.

Developed by one man (Daisuke Amaya – otherwise known as 'Pixel') over a five-year period, *Cave Story* is an impressively ambitious project that took the gaming world by storm. Not only was Amaya instrumental in bringing *Metroidvania* back to the forefront of gaming, he was also one of the main factors in making indie games the genuine alternative to the mainstream they have become today. *Cave Story* has since had several re-releases, console ports, updates and even a 3D version and is considered something of a video game phenomenon – and all because of one man! Daisuke Amaya – we salute you.

We hope you've enjoyed our little look back at this classic genre. Perhaps it's inspired you to track some of these games down? Or maybe you're thinking of finding your old console and dusting off some of your favourite *Metroidvania* games. Either way, we hope it doesn't involve too much backtracking and too many key items. But do take a map just to be safe.



ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE
GUIDES YOU
THROUGH THE
REALM OF
TABLETOP GAMING



As gamers around the world recover from the gifting frenzy that is the annual mid-winter celebrations, regular readers have to confront a familiar dilemma.

Not what game to play first. We shall generously assume that you've had a chance to dig out and play at least one hot new game somewhere between the *Doctor Who* Christmas Special and the *Jools Holland Hootenanny*. The great choice will be 'which gaming-related models to build first?' The line between board gaming and wargaming has blurred over the years, and gluing together and painting toy soldiers is, for some at us at least, very much part of the gaming hobby.

However, your humble correspondent must confess that I have always been more than a little bit cack-handed in the matters. The STARBURST Secret Gaming Thunderdome is filled with unpainted resin, plastic, and metal models. Worse still, some of them are unglued. Much of the *Dreadball* and *Bloodbowl* leagues are held together with Blu-Tack and goodwill.

This blurring of the lines doesn't make it easy for non-gaming loved ones, however. More than a few gamers will have received not the often-hinted-at *Warhammer* and *Imperial Assault* plastic models, but something 'close enough'. The two most common substitutes tend to be Airfix and LEGO.

LEGO should need no introduction, but Airfix may need a quick run-down. Airfix specialise in 1:72 scale army models.

Beloved by a certain sort of hobbyist, these simple plastic kits let your local war enthusiast snap together a facsimile of a real army in the comfort of their well-ventilated bedrooms. To many of us, this seems a bit of a waste. Why have an army when it doesn't have any rules?

Of course, people have been using wargaming rules with Airfix models for years, but the company has never sanctioned an official ruleset until very recently. Those lovely fiends at Modiphius Entertainment (who have brought us *Thunderbirds* and *Siege of the Citadel* board games) are also responsible for *Airfix Battles*, a rather fun and pretty simple wargame.

It would be highly unfair to call *Airfix Battles* 'baby's first wargame', but I do keep hearing stories of proud wargaming dads using it to lure their kids into the hobby of blowing things up with dice and tape measures.

The core game box comes with a bunch of A2 maps, some dice, some cards, and a rulebook. It's probably the only thing that's come out of an Airfix box that I haven't immediately tried to apply glue to. I mean, I could try gluing the plastic dice together, but I don't think that would help. It's a D6-based game that uses squares on a map for movement. Those expecting more depth are sort of missing the point here; the idea is that after a very quick read of the rules you can get stuck into a wargame without too much prep. Technically, you don't even need any Airfix models, you can just use counters

from the box, but where's the fun in that?

The deck of Force Cards lets you create a balanced armed force for you to play, and the deck of Command Cards tell you what sort of moves you can play during your turn (usually attack, charge, rally - that sort of thing). You also have a command figure somewhere on the battle-map, who usually tells you how many cards you can play in a round. Some cards let you interrupt your opponent, others let you improve morale. Yes, your brave plastic soldiers will run away if you continue to let them get blown up. Combat is brutal and very bloody. Put the wrong unit in front of a tank and watch it go crunch. There are scenarios, but they're very simple. This is the joy of blowing stuff up and it's also the antidote for anyone who's worried about spending too much on toy soldiers.

To be honest, the real fun bit is identifying your favourite plastic army man (I was always a fan of the radio operator) and then working out exactly how useful they are in the field of battle. This is a game we've discovered that anyone can pick up. Modiphius games tend to be pretty inclusive, but they've outdone themselves in this instance. If you're looking for a use for all those plastic army men (or you fancy some World War II action but can't bring yourself to invest in too many models), then this is perfect. Apparently, expansions are on their way; the core game will scratch most of your itches, however, and is certainly worth adding to the shopping list. A must-buy for the wargaming family.

LEGO fans aren't quite catered for in the



same way. LEGO produce their own spin-off games, certainly, but war isn't really a LEGO thing, despite plenty of LEGO toys featuring sword-wielding ninjas and mutant monster armies. Heck, they even have the licence for *Star Wars*, which y'know, is about war in the stars. But there are, as yet, no official wargaming rules for LEGO.

Where there is a gap in the market, however, there are always fans looking to take advantage. *BrikWars*, which has been around since 1995, is an attempt to make LEGO wargaming an actual thing. It sort of works, mostly by ramming its tongue very firmly in its cheek.

The rules are free (and worth every penny), and the game has its own sort of backstory. Basically, everything that is made of LEGO is at war with everything else made of LEGO. Everything was once peaceful until the coming of the Spacemen, at which point the sheer awesome of Spacemen caused war to break out. Or to put it another way, LEGO didn't really have any laser gun toys until the LEGO Space range was launched. After that, WAR! Oh, and all of reality sits on a beige carpet. Because this is LEGO. There is much, much more to it than that, but you get the gist.

BrikWars does the near impossible task of taking a game in which you literally build your own units and making it playable. The game's most recent (and stable) edition is *BrikWars 2010*. The core game (called *QuikWars*) pits minifigs against each other. Everything moves five inches, everything rolls D6 or D10 dice depending on actions. Weapons have simple categories (one-handed, two-handed, ranged, etc.). Certain figs can be given special powers called Stupendous Feats that broaden the feel and flavour of the game.



You can also make Constructions, aka LEGO models. The damage they can take is based on how many LEGO studs you can see, and you chop bits off during the fight. That's the core game, everything else is just jam.

And there is certainly more jam if you want it. It can be as complicated or as simple as you want it to be. The *BrikWars* wiki is quite detailed and also very funny - there are some nice references to the movie early on that are pretty daft. The game doesn't take itself at all seriously, doesn't try to be official and is rather ace to play.

There are a couple more combinations of LEGO and wargaming that are both worth

noting. Weirdly, both of these are attempts to mix mecha-combat with LEGO. *Mobile Frame Zero* is a game in which you build and design your own mechs using LEGO and then take it into a LEGO-like battlefield. As you activate your laser cannons and chainsaw arms, you remove bits from your opponent's model (because it's LEGO, it's easy). The game is legitimately free to download on the Internet, though the designers may be happier if you order a dead-tree version. Both can be found on the Mobile Frame Zero website. It's been created by the same people who brought you the award-winning RPGs *Dogs in the Vine Yard* and *Human Contact* and has a cult following.

The other attempt to make a mecha/LEGO game is called *Mechabrick*. It takes the rather novel approach of selling you weird add-ons to minifigs that look like *Battletech*-style mechs. The game sold quite well in 2015 and was playable during 2016's Salute Wargame convention. It's a pretty simple, fairly fun mecha wargame, though the LEGO element always seemed a bit irrelevant. If you really fancy giant robot-shaped parts for your minifigs, the remaining sets are on sale for pennies right now.

In other news, we at the STARBURST Gaming Thunderdome are gearing up for a rather packed year. We've already got our bags packed for the UK Games Expo in Birmingham later this year and if you're very lucky, you may even catch us at Salute and Dragonmeet. The UK gaming scene has never been busier; expect a year like no other.

Ed Fortune can be contacted at ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com and tweeted at [@ed_fortune](https://twitter.com/ed_fortune). He's always interested to know what games you are playing. Unless it's *Monopoly*. Because friends don't let friends play *Monopoly*. It's never fun, not even in clown costumes.



WATTO'S EMPORIUM

STUFF WE LIKED FROM
AROUND THE WEB
THIS MONTH WITH
JACK BOTTOMLEY



Games 2 Movies

Well, the year may change but it seems the rule that 'pretty much all movies adapted from games don't work' has not, as the long time coming adaptation of Ubisoft's **Assassin's Creed** hasn't exactly enjoyed glowing reviews, as it's kicked off 2017 at the movies. However, we cannot deny the visual approach has been captured pretty well, as evident by this figurine from 365games.co.uk, which shows Michael Fassbender as lead protagonist assassin (can an assassin be a goodie?) Aguilar and also showcases just how well the film has captured the games' aesthetic, even if its script may need to start again from the last checkpoint.

Speaking of game to film transitions though, it seems that you cannot keep a good arse-kicking, zombie blasting heroine down, as Milla Jovovich is back as Alice for the sixth time in Paul W. S. Anderson's latest film of his un-killable sci-fi/horror/action franchise, **Resident Evil: The Final Chapter**. Critics have been far from kind on this series, based on the Capcom games, but the audience has remained loyal and this is supposedly the last in the franchise; well, that's their story anyway (read more about the film on page 62). So why not get dressed for battle, as the film hits cinemas this February, with the aid of this impressive metal belt buckle from CollectiblesExpresUS at etsy.com, which brings the logo of the sinister Umbrella Corporation to life (if you'll pardon the pun).

**AGUILAR MICHAEL FASSBENDER (ASSASSIN'S CREED MOVIE)
UBI COLLECTIBLES FIGURINE - £36.99
AVAILABLE FROM 365GAMES.CO.UK**

**RESIDENT EVIL UMBRELLA LOGO METAL AND ENAMEL BELT
BUCKLE - £10.84
AVAILABLE FROM ETSY.COM**





No Country for Old Mutants

As Hugh Jackman prepares to bring a nastier, older, more grizzled incarnation of Logan/Wolverine to the big screen this year (read our feature on the upcoming **Logan** on page 38) - which might discourage Deadpool from cracking any more gags about the sideburn-donning, cigar-chomping, claw-drawing mutant in future movies (...or not) - why not remind yourself of the bloody origins of old man Logan? And over at everafterguide.com, there is an eye-catching way you can show off your love of Mark Millar and Steve McNiven's older Logan, with this shirt decorated by the black, white and red cover art of **Old Man Logan #5**. Though sadly, the shirt does not come with a Johnny Cash musical accompaniment... unlike the badass trailer.

WOLVERINE OLD MAN LOGAN #5 COVER MEN'S T-SHIRT - \$21.99 USD
AVAILABLE FROM EVERAFTERGUIDE.COM



Monkey Merch

As we have made quite clear this issue, King Kong is (silver)back, tossing rocks and providing prehistoric shocks in the great looking upcoming reboot **Kong: Skull Island** (see page 16). For over eighty years, Kong has climbed the skyscraper of pop culture, becoming one of the silver screen's greatest ever monsters. However, before he arrives, bigger and badder than ever in Jordan Vogt-Roberts' brilliantly cast new movie, we had a look across the Internet for some merchandise befitting the sizeable simian. And we found this rather adorable (despite the fact he is scrunching up a helicopter) vinyl pop figure, from iwantoneofthose.com, which is a smaller-scaled celebration of our impending return to Skull Island.

As well as that, there was this wristwatch from bonanzamarket.co.uk, which decorates the clock face with Kong himself and suggests it is high time (see what we did there?) we saw more movie monsters get in on the wrist wear game.

However, our favourite piece on the site was this brilliant hoodie which sees old Kong get a day off from climbing skyscrapers and being misunderstood by the - supposedly more advanced - human race, as he is replaced by our sssllllloooooowwww-moving mammal mate the sloth (last seen working at the DMV in *Zootropolis*). This shirt tips its hat to the original 1933 classic **King Kong**, whilst also painting a picture of what could have been - just imagine King Sloth hitting cinemas! Mind you, what self-respecting pilot would want to attack one of our long-clawed, cute, furry friends, even if they had a woman in hand and were causing a fracas? Plus, with how fast these guys move, it would be more Dull Island than Skull Island.

KONG: SKULL ISLAND KONG VINYL POP FIGURE - £14.99
AVAILABLE FROM IWANTONEOFTHOSE.COM

GORILLA KING KONG STYLE ART WRIST WATCH - £18.89
AVAILABLE FROM BONANZAMARKET.CO.UK

SLOTH KING KONG PLANES ATTACK HOODIE - £44.76
AVAILABLE FROM BONANZAMARKET.CO.UK



PAUL MOUNT'S



This month, we roll back the centuries in **TIMELESS**, play host to some **TRAVELERS** from the future in contemporary America and find that **DOCTOR WHO** failed to deliver the anticipated Christmas turkey...

Anyway, there's this crazy terrorist guy who wants to change history. He steals a time machine invented by Johnson off **Peep Show** and goes back to 1937 to stop the Hindenburg blowing up. So the US Government, okay, they recruit this brainy female historian and a Delta Force tough guy and a goofy black guy (but he isn't really goofy) and, phew, wow, luckily they've got this prototype version of the time machine (they call it the Lifeboat!) and they use it to time travel back to 1937 to stop the mad terrorist from preventing the Hindenburg blowing up. If it doesn't blow up, it'll change the course of history, obvs. But it does blow up but at a different time and only two people are killed. When they get back to the present day, guess what? Yep, the timeline has changed and lots of stuff is different and all mixed up! But the terrorist has still got his time machine and he can go off whenever he likes to mess up American history. Blimey. If this all sounds a bit breathless then it's supposed to; but in reality, it's nowhere near as breathless as the first episode of Time Tunn... sorry, **Timeless**, Fox's barmy, barking mad new time travel adventure series currently berthed on E4 in Blighty.

Timeless is utterly absurd – at times hilariously so. It's eye-bogglingly fast-paced, entirely preposterous and yet it's also gloriously, relishably entertaining high-concept hokum – and please bear in mind that my teeth grate whenever I see our kind of television dismissed as hokum by oafish sniffy newspaper critics. But in all honesty, there's no more appropriate word for **Timeless** because it really is utterly silly hokum that could be accused of having its tongue stuck firmly in its cheek if not for its unending earnestness in the face of its unremitting daftness. But you know how it is, you really gotta love a

time travel series that drops a big clunking steaming time machine (it looks like the **Stargate** TV series prop cut in half with a giant ball bearing bunged in the middle) at various points in American history, gives busy production designers the opportunity to recreate different historical eras on shoestring budgets, and generally does a pretty convincing job of it.

Not for nothing did I refer earlier to Irwin Allen's short-lived 1968 sci-fi potboiler **The Time Tunnel**, because **Timeless** is in many ways a whizz-bang variation on that show's theme but, mercifully, without shamelessly utilising feature film stock footage to pad out the running time/spectacle quotient. Each

week, our (initially) mismatched heroes (they learn to grudgingly respect one another, of course) set off in hot pursuit of the twisted terrorist Garcia Flynn (Goran Visnjic) and find themselves rubbing shoulders with various iconic figures from American history – Davy Crockett, Abe Lincoln, Benedict Arnold, General Washington, and Bonnie and Clyde have all popped up in the first handful of episodes – as they battle to thwart Flynn's scheme to change history. But it's not quite that simple. This being multi-layered modern sci-fi, there's no place for simple random episodic adventures; the whole series is threaded through with a mysterious conspiracy as Flynn and, by default of pursuit, Preston, Logan, and Barret – our trio of temporal tourists – try to solve the riddle of the mysterious Rittenhouse, the McGuffin that essentially powers the 'quest' element of the series. Add to all this... err... hokum, we have the inevitable human interest drama as our leads have their own personal demons; historian Lucy Preston (Abigail Spencer) finds her own timeline especially disrupted as she returns from the Hindenburg adventure to discover that her terminally ill mother is up and about and as fit as a fiddle, her sister has never existed and she's suddenly engaged to a man she's never met before.

At this point in the series – the show is currently on its mid-season break stateside following the screening of its tenth episode – the pieces of the show's jigsaw puzzle are slowly falling into place and it's shaken off the hectic pace of its slightly ludicrous opening episode and started to explore with some intelligence the ramifications of temporal paradoxes. By its very nature, it still feels a little bitty with the potential to become extremely formulaic once its core *raison d'être* has been resolved, which is why I suspect the show might not survive beyond the back-end six episodes waiting in the





TRAVELERS

wings as, with its current format, it's going to run out of story pretty soon. But there's much to enjoy in **Timeless**, which is far too clankingly unsubtle to join the 2016 Great TV list. At times it's capable of extraordinary plot devices that will leave you gawping – the problem of how our heroes kit themselves up in clothes suitable to their destinations is laughably solved by the random introduction of 'the wardrobe dock', which contains specially designed clothing for just about any era in American history. Very handy.

Timeless is either colourful, gaudy nonsense or a clever spin on an extremely well-worn science fiction concept – and sometimes it's a bit of both in any given episode. But it's fun, well cast and quite witty when it needs to be, and there's really never a dull moment even if there are often some quite ridiculous ones. Hokum by any other name, in fact...

TRAVELERS

With time travel currently flavour-of-the-month on US TV (the TV series version of **Time After Time** débuts on ABC this year), I can also recommend **Travelers** (Netflix, UK) as a more thought-provoking alternative to the more shameless shenanigans of the **Timeless** crew. Created by Brad (**Stargate**) Wright, this engrossing and occasionally conceptually disturbing twelve-part first season (I'm hoping for more) is a multi-layered narrative in which the living consciousnesses of 'travelers' from some dystopian future are sent back to the twenty-first century to occupy human hosts at the exact moment of their 'natural causes' deaths. And they've travelled back for a reason. The Earth in their time period is a chaos of devastation and destruction – we only find out the cause (and it's a little prosaic, in all honesty) in Episode Six – and they have travelled to the present day to work together on 'missions' specified by their futuristic superiors to prevent the disaster that devastates the Earth. It appears that 'travelers' are ingratiating themselves all across the world and the show deals

specifically with one group who are, inevitably, quite a ragtag bunch, including a senior FBI special agent (played by **Will and Grace**'s Eric McCormack), a promising teen athlete, an abused single mother, a junkie and a girl with a learning disability and epilepsy. Of course, once the 'travelers' take over their bodies, their personalities begin to change (especially MacKenzie Porter's Marcy Warton, whose intellect suddenly explodes into life post-transfer) and it's not long before those close to them in their 'real' lives begin to notice the changes. Meanwhile, the quintet band together, knock up a hi-tech HQ (as you would) and set about working to change the future.

Travelers is a refreshingly unflashy series. There are no real big visual effects set pieces, nothing showy or CGI-heavy; it's basically a very intense story of human resilience and determination and ingenuity. The drama comes not only from the team's struggle to prevent their terrible

future becoming a reality, but the reactions of those around them, the activities of a shadowy group who are clearly opposed to them (and, in the tense fifth episode, kidnap and torture several of the group) and, perhaps most interestingly, how the human 'condition' can survive and adapt and how our 'travelers' come to terms with their new identities and their new lives – because once they've been transferred, there's no going back.

There's actually something a little macabre about the central premise and, in later episodes, the show even starts to get a bit **Invasion of the Body Snatchers** as we discover that there are more 'travelers' taking up residence in human hosts than we might first have been led to believe... *they're here!* Episode Seven's storyline, which shows how the 'travelers' mete out their own form of justice to one of their own who has crossed the line, is quite chilling. As the series progresses, our sympathies for the 'travelers' and their plight start to wane a bit and the show becomes as much about humanity – what it is, what it means and the forms it can take – as it is about its sci-fi 'end of the world' trappings. Tucked away on Netflix and with none of the hoo-hah and plaudits heaped upon the likes of **Stranger Things** and **Westworld**, **Travelers** could easily be dismissed as some cheap, unambitious knock-off. It's low-key and relatively unassuming but it's really much better than it has any right to be and undoubtedly much better than you might expect. Take a trip to Netflix and let this one slowly work its magic.

CHRISTMAS CRACKERS AND NO TURKEYS

In a seasonal schedule packed with singing, dancing, baking and overlong special episodes of popular drama series – filmed in foreign climes just for



THE LAST DRAGONSLAYER

the hell of it – there were a few fantasy gems dotted around if you knew where to look for them and felt so inclined after a few days gorging on dead birds and slewing back buckets of eggnog, Snowballs, and Baileys. Sky 1 gave its primetime Christmas Night slot over to **The Last Dragonslayer**, a feature-length adaptation of the novel by Jasper Fforde. Despite a decent cast including Andrew Buchan, Pauline Collins, Ricky 'my arse' Tomlinson, Matt Berry, and Anna Chancellor, this felt a bit cheesy and homespun and distinctly underpowered. Set in a fantasy depiction of Hereford (whaaaaa.?), which is part medieval and part contemporary (they have TV and giant supermarkets – just like the real Hereford, in fact), **The Last Dragonslayer** was full of broadly drawn characters and glib humour and its rather weak and unconvincing fantasy kingdom was neither one thing nor the other. The pace was distinctly pedestrian (it certainly did *drag on!*) and there were about three minutes of actual full-on dragon action

ALSO SCREENING



LEGION

Based on the character seen in the X-Men comics, Legion tells the story of a schizophrenic who discovers that the visions and voices he sees and hears might not just be in his head.

Fox from February 9th

FORTITUDE

Second season for the bleak-as-buggery offbeat mystery thriller set in a remote Arctic town. Brrrr.

Sky Atlantic from January 26th

24: LEGACY

This new flogging-a-dead-horse spin-off from the real-time thriller stars The Walking Dead's Corey Hawkins (?) as a ranger (US Army, not Power) racing against the ticking clock to stop blah-blah-terrorists-blah.

Sky 1 from February 15th

across the entire hundred-minute running time. It wasn't terrible but it was one to file under 'epic try' rather than 'epic fail'...

Good to see the first episode of **Inside No. 9's** third series finally meeting its public after its début screening at the STARBURST Film Festival last summer. *The Devil of Christmas* was even more glorious the second time around, a po-faced 1970s drama (recreated using actual 1970s TV cameras and tech) hiding a handful of typically wicked twists and surprises and an ending which sailed magnificently close to deeply unseasonal bad taste. Reece Sheersmith and Steve Pemberton are clearly still on blistering top form for this new series, which looks set to be a major must-see TV highlight for the early months of the year...

After a dodgy series and a few uninspiring specials, good to see long-running 'impossible crimes' detective **Jonathan Creek** (Alan Davies) back on form for the new *Daemons' Roost* festive special. The show has lost much of the quirky charm of its early years and a married middle-aged Jonathan is much less compelling than the single/living in a windmill Jonathan of the series' formative days. David Renwick's nippy, if overlong, script at least addressed the passage of time and the ageing of our hero in a crisp, wintry country pile adventure; it only fumbled the ball in one extraordinary ill-judged sequence in which Jonathan and his wife Polly incinerate a vengeful bad guy and no-one seems to give much of a damn. It seems that Jonathan's not quite up the creek just yet...

Yes, I'm well aware that I swore off **Doctor Who** after last Christmas' horrendous howler but **TV Zone**, like ladies, is entitled to change its mind and I couldn't resist taking a peek at this year's effort: **Doctor Who** in 'not shit Christmas special' shocker! Whilst never hitting the gloriously entertaining and grandstanding heights of the best of the Russell T Davies Christmas episodes, Steven Moffat's *The Return of Doctor Mystério* (it's the name the show is known by in Mexico - oh what self-referential larks) came damned close and was a significant step up in quality from last year's travesty. It was, in fact, so much fun – and so refreshingly unselfconscious – that I've even watched it a second time and I ain't done that with an episode of **Who** for several seasons. Freed from the restraints of the stodgy baggage he's lumbered the series with in recent years, Moffat delivered a colourful script that managed to be witty, exciting, poignant and only occasionally a little bit mawkish. The hour-long special married the most familiar of **Doctor Who** concepts - a wafer-thin alien invasion plot - to an affectionate if undemanding homage to 1970s superhero movies such as **Superman** (indeed, very specifically **Superman**) with a bit of sweet romance courtesy of supporting players Lucy Fletcher (Charity Wakefield) and Grant Gordon (Justin Chatwin), alter ego for the high-flying New York superhero the Ghost. With an enthusiastic performance from Peter Capaldi, now teamed up with Matt Lucas as Nardole (a far more restrained performance

DOCTOR WHO



than we might have feared), zesty direction from Ed Bazalgette - who really clicked with the superhero aesthetic the script was aiming for and who brought the mean streets of New York to the screen courtesy of atmospheric location shooting on a wet backlot in Bulgaria - the script often sidestepped Moffat's trademark endless gags and quips and focused on being witty rather than wordy.

Whilst there did seem to be some effort put into making the episode attractive to an audience unfamiliar with the series or those who have become jaded by it recently, the final act saw Moffat unable to resist returning to his own feeble attempt at creating the emotional resonance so effortlessly evoked by Russell T Davies as we were reminded of the ghastly River Song in another attempt to convince us that she is the great love of the Doctor's life and it's sooooo hard for him to carry on without her. This was a relationship that *never* convinced no matter how many Doctors Moffat threw at it and there was surely not a damp eye in the house as the Doctor momentarily moped over memories of his Great Lost Love. But *The Return of Doctor Mystério* was generally a really rather pleasant way of wasting an hour on Christmas night. It was light, it was fun, it was utterly innocuous but, like so much of what we've had to watch over the last six years or so under Moffat, it wasn't really much like **Doctor Who**. But, just this once, I'm prepared to give him a pass on that one. +

Email me at paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com or do the Twitter thang @PMount. Catch up with the latest news, reviews, gossip and general geek idiocy in the brand new **TV Zone Plus** podcast on iTunes.



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it's only a movie

a column by JORDAN ROYCE

There is something a little bit wrong with Disney *Star Wars*. Wow. I feel better already just typing those words. I wanted *Star Wars* to be great. I wanted the spin-offs and ongoing new trilogy to carry forward the mythos and expand the universe, but it just isn't happening for me. Last year, I really enjoyed *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, but was not blown away. I loved the new characters. I liked the *Star Warsiness* of it. Yet I referred to it as *Star Wars* by focus group, and this is a feeling that has only gotten worse with repeat viewings. It was an entry desperate to be a hit with an ageing fan base. Every stroke felt designed to avoid the wrath of a bunch of middle-aged keyboard warriors, rather than engage with the imaginations of the children who should have been one of their primary demographics. A bunch of interesting characters and charismatic performances were wasted on an updated reworking of *Episode IV*. *SW:TFA* broke no new ground. I was intrigued by stuff like the Knights of Ren, but nothing was made of this. You were just expected to enjoy a *greatest hits* experience, and hold your breath waiting for *Episode VIII*.

Not only did *SW:TFA* fail to deliver much progression, it committed the cardinal sin of my *Sequels Rule Book*. It achieved some aspects of its successful narrative at the expense of its superior predecessor. If you are an *Alien* fan and consider all the movies canon, then you will feel where I am coming from. Like the happy ending of *Aliens*, you can now watch *Return of the Jedi*, knowing that the happy ending is anything but. Shortly afterwards, Han and Leia split up. Their son becomes the intergalactic equivalent of Adolf Hitler. Han and Chewie lose the Millennium Falcon, go back to smuggling crap around in a space barge (i.e. much worse off than when we met him in that cantina), and Luke ends up all alone on a rocky hill, with a messy beard full of dried food. They should have all stayed with the Ewoks.

None of this was a problem for Disney. I was among a small minority with that opinion, and Disney were rewarded by a Jedi Mind Trick created by middle-aged fan boys playing *Star Wars* bingo, ticking off cameos and Easter eggs that bought their allegiance relatively cheaply. To even suggest that *SW:TFA* was anything less than a

masterpiece was quickly deemed heresy in the same way you are now attacked for daring to recognise any positive aspects of the prequels. Disney went on to bag a small fortune with this strategy. This success has led to Disney going even further down this creatively bankrupt rabbit hole...

We are now two movies into the Disney era, and *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* pushes the *Star Wars* bingo card to ever new heights of fanwank - telling the story of the theft of the original Death Star plans. To be clear, I did enjoy it to a certain degree - but man, did it play safe. *RO* introduced little new, and quickly set about a string of cameos and Easter eggs delivered at an incessant rate, with varying degrees of success.

SW:TFA was virtually a remake of *Episode IV*, and now here we are watching the hours actually leading up to *Episode IV*. *RO* resembles a Wookieepedia entry rather than a screenplay, as it sets about retconning a plot device from a far superior movie. So now we know that Galen Erso built the Death Star with a deliberate flaw. What next, a movie that explains why the two most wanted blokes in the galaxy are hanging out on Tatooine using their surnames of Skywalker and Kenobi? Why not explain why moisture farmer Uncle Owen wanders around cosplaying as a Jedi Knight?

The *Star Wars* bingo stuff ranged from quite clever to downright annoying. The inclusion of Kyber crystals, the holy Journal of the Whills, and finally seeing Darth Vader getting some down time at his Bast Castle crib were great examples of this working in a way that expanded the mythos. The blue milk and R2-D2 and C-3PO cameos were pathetic. Whilst Ponda Baba and Dr Evazan turning up to spout their Mos Eisley Cantina diatribe was the fan service straw that almost broke the camel's back. The reaction to this relentless bombardment of familiar iconography just for the sake of it was met with all of the whoops and squees that Disney were hoping for from its mid-life crisis blood plasma. A fair few cum shots were also triggered every time 'Vader' appeared on screen. So, it could be argued that Disney are playing this right, but what happens from now on? Has Disney given up on the really young audience?

You know you have a problem when more than one review of a *Star Wars* movie in the mainstream press begins with a warning that *RO* may not be suitable for really young audiences. No review of *The Empire Strikes Back* carried such a warning, and

that movie featured Vader's head being decapitated and Luke's hand being severed. Disney wanted dark, but have really ended up with bleak. War movies can be dark, yet still captivating. The sheer blandness of the cast does not help in this regard either. Jyn Erso (played by Felicity Jones) is a forgettable lead whose only powerful line never made it past the trailer. Only droid K-2S0 and the Jedha guardian duo of Baze Malbus and warrior-monk Chirrut Îmwe made any impression. Long fight scenes are never livened up with dialogue that could have developed any of this cast, so even the dramatic scenes play a little flat. With a ballsy ending that kills off all of this crew it would have been nice to actually care once the carnage started to bite.

Now we arrive at the elephant in the room. How ironic that nearly sixty years after playing a character who uses new technology to reanimate deceased persons, Peter Cushing himself should suffer a similar fate. Whilst I have heard many praise this move, I find it a horrific misjudgement that simply does not work. The *uncanny valley* has never before claimed such a beloved victim, and those that think this actually looked OK need laser eye surgery, preferably from a lightsaber. For many like me, who grew up with this guy and know every line on his face, this just ruins any suspension of disbelief. The moment you first saw his face in a reflection felt like the perfect moment of homage, but they just couldn't help themselves. Since the tragic passing of Carrie Fisher, you might also think I despised that moment as well. In truth, I think they got away with it, as it was a fleeting shot. One day, modern effects may finally get this right, but right now don't believe the hype.

There is still much to enjoy, and cinematographer Greg Fraser shines brighter than Gareth Edwards, rescuing the final act with his scenes of galactic combat. I just feel strongly now that something new and less crowd-pleasing has to emerge from that galaxy far, far away...

[Oh yeah, almost forgot. Deep down we all knew 'Vader' wasn't quite Vader, either. Go on, you know I'm right...]

Jordan Royce can be contacted at jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com and hosts the STARBURST Radio Show every Wednesday 9pm until 11pm GMT on Fab Radio International - www.fabradiointernational.com also available from iTunes as a Podcast

The fans are right! Peter Cushing has been perfectly recreated in *ROGUE ONE: A STAR WARS STORY*...



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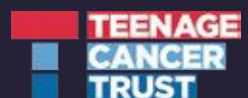
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